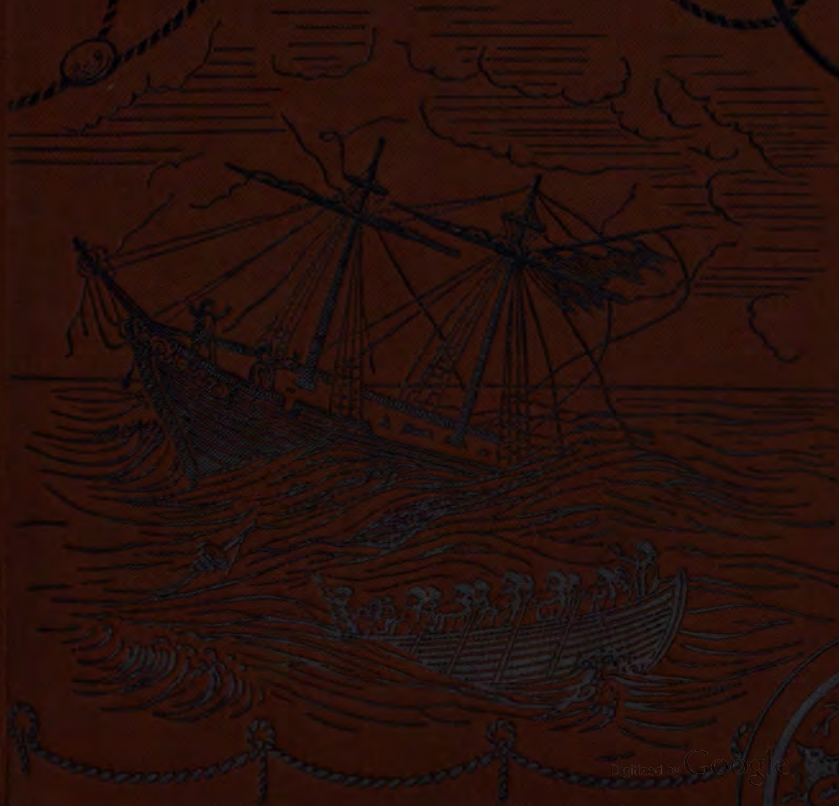


A VOICE FROM THE SEA

RUTH ELLIOTT.





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A
VOICE FROM THE SEA;

OR,

The Wreck of the "Eglantine."

BY

RUTH ELLIOTT,

AUTHOR OF

"John Lyon," "Undeceived," "James Daryll," etc., etc.

THIRD THOUSAND.



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A VOICE FROM THE SEA.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

RICHARD HILLIARD, shipowner, sat at dinner in his richly-furnished dining-room. He was alone, for it was one of his fancies always to dismiss the servants when his son was away. He said it irritated him to be perpetually watched, and Richard Hilliard was a nervous man.

By his side was a small square table covered with papers, bills of lading, letters from underwriters and shipping agents, communications from home and foreign ports, all arranged according to their order with methodical precision. Between these and the dinner his attention was divided. It was a curious custom of his, this bringing business to the dinner-table, and one over which he and his son had had many a battle. But Christian Hilliard was dining out, and his father felt his absence a relief, for there were letters beside him which demanded immediate thought and action,

but which he would not have had Christian see for half his fortune.

Two letters, one from Captain Thorpe, of the ship *Eglantine*, the other bearing no signature, but apparently written by, or at the instigation of, a seaman of the same vessel, spelling and composition alike defective. Over these two Richard Hilliard pondered long, with knitted brows.

Captain Thorpe's ran thus:—"There is a rumour among the men—how, or by whom spread, I do not know—that the *Eglantine* is not fit to send to sea. I have done my best to reassure them, but they evidently distrust me. If you would send me Grant's letter to read to them, it would have more effect than anything I could say."

A simple request, apparently, but one which it was impossible to comply with.

Ringling the bell, impatiently, Richard Hilliard ordered the dinner to be removed, and with the secrecy habitual to him, thrust the letters into his pocket till he was again alone. Then he spread them on the table before him, bending over them with anxious thought. The second letter seemed to give him the most annoyance, though his lip curled contemptuously as he read: "Sir,—One of your ships, called the *Eglantine*, is just going out to sea with rotten timbers and a heavy cargo; so heavy, that there is only a few inches of side above the water. The men know that the timber is rotten, and they know that the ship isn't safe;

and they won't go to sea unless the cargo is lightened, and the rotten timbers done up. If you don't do it they will leave the ship, or lay complaints before the magistrates."

It was at the threat more than the spelling that the shipowner's lip curled. He knew the men were powerless, and he could afford a little contempt. And yet he did not like the letter. Whoever wrote it might give trouble unless some means were found to stop his tongue, and Richard Hilliard was not one to stick at trifles.

"Leave the ship!" he repeated, with a quiet smile; "easier said than done, my fine fellow; you had better try it. The ship is going to sea, and you are going with her, so you might as well make up your mind to accept the inevitable. However, I'll just find out who you are, and perhaps I shall have a word to say to you."

Laying the letter on one side, he took up Captain Thorpe's. "Confound the fellow!" he exclaimed, with irritation; "he has been listening to their complaints and arguing with them, instead of ordering them to hold their tongues and be off to their work. That is the only way of managing such fellows. Send him Grant's letter, indeed!"

Gathering up the papers, he walked slowly out of the dining-room into his own private room across the passage, and opening his desk, brought from a secret drawer the letter in question. It contained the result of a close examination of the

Eglantine made by the man Grant, and as yet no eyes but those of the writer and the shipowner had rested upon it. Toward the end stood this sentence: "In her present state, the *Eglantine* is certainly not fit for sea. Indeed, I doubt if any repairs will make her seaworthy." No wonder Richard Hilliard repeated Captain Thorpe's words sarcastically, "Send me Grant's letter."

"Have more effect on them!" he muttered, "you are nearer the truth than you think, Captain Thorpe. However, I'll soon settle you."

Taking up his pen, he began to write: "I am sorry there is this feeling among the men, sorry and surprised. If the *Eglantine* is not seaworthy, what is the meaning of the late repairs? As you know, I have been at great expense to have her thoroughly seen to, and the repairs have been extensive. She is now in a fit state to go to sea. Grant's letter contained a list of repairs necessary, *all of which* have been attended to. You had better tell the men this. Do not argue with them; merely repeat my words in a decisive tone—manner goes a long way with such men—and order them off to their work. I am not going to have my plans altered, and business interfered with, to please the timid scruples of a womanish crew. Tell them they are a set of cowards, and shame them into silence." Then followed a few directions as to cargo and time of sailing, and the letter was sealed and sent.

It was a cold, dark night, and Christian Hilliard

shivered as he hurried along the almost deserted streets.

"Cold enough for November," he muttered, drawing his collar high over his ears; "I verily believe the seasons are changing. Father Christmas of the olden times would not recognise his degenerate sons of the present day, and as for summer!" A significant shrug finished the sentence. Turning a corner sharply, he almost came in contact with a man in an ordinary seaman's dress.

"I beg pardon, sir—Mr. Christian Hilliard, I think?"

"At your service, my friend," was the ready reply. Christian Hilliard had ever a pleasant word for rich and poor.

"Can I speak with you a minute, sir?"

"Won't to-morrow do?" asked Christian, as a keen wind came cutting up from the sea.

"No, sir; to-morrow won't do as well as to-night," was the decisive answer. "I won't keep you long out in this cold, but I must speak to you."

"Speak on, then," replied Christian, good-humouredly, resigning himself to his fate.

"Sir, you don't know much about shipping, I hear; you've been in foreign parts, and have had nothing to do with your father's business."

"Not much; but, my good fellow, what has that to do with you?"

"It has a great deal to do with me, and with

many others too, sir." He paused ; and Christian Hilliard tried in vain in the darkness to catch a view of his face.

Detecting his design, the man drew further into the shadow of the houses.

"It does not matter who I am ; you would not know me if you saw me. Sir, I hear that you have a kind heart."

Christian laughed lightly. "I am glad somebody has the charity to give me a good word."

"Don't laugh, sir," said the man, and there was a sad earnestness in his tone. "It is no laughing matter that I have to speak to you about to-night. Maybe if you had been at home these last few years looking after things I should not have had to say anything. You would have found out for yourself."

"Found out what ?"

"What I am going to tell you, Mr. Hilliard. Perhaps you know the ship *Eglantine* ?"

"*Eglantine* ? Let me see ; an ugly, clumsy-looking affair, with a figure-head hideous enough for his Satanic Majesty's sister. I know her."

"For some months she has been laid up for repairs. On her last voyage she met with various accidents which rendered her unfit for sea, and Mr. Hilliard has been spending a lot of money in getting her repaired. Now she is ready to start on another voyage, but her timbers are rotten and her cargo far too heavy."

"Her timbers rotten ! Nonsense !" echoed

Christian; "if she has just been repaired the rotten timbers have been removed, of course."

"Nothing of the sort, sir. I don't say that Mr. Hilliard knows she is rotten, but he will know to-night. Perhaps he knows already. A letter has been sent to tell him."

"Then why do you speak to me? My father is the proper one to appeal to; I know nothing of these things."

"Why do I speak to you? I will tell you. Two years ago, the *Island Flower* sailed out of this port with just such another cargo as the *Eglantine's*. There was a rumour that she was not seaworthy, and complaints were made by the crew to Mr. Hilliard. He sent a surveyor over the vessel, who said she was perfectly safe, and she went to sea, and was lost with all hands."

"That proves nothing. Lots of ships are lost every year; better ones than the *Island Flower* or the *Eglantine*."

"That is not all, sir. Last year the *Pearly Spray* was sent to sea with such a heavy cargo, that there were only a few inches of the side above water—below the main deck I mean, of course. The captain told Mr. Hilliard that it wasn't safe, and the next morning he was dismissed. Captain Bakewell went instead."

"Well, what became of the ship?"

"She was lost, but the men escaped with their lives."

"My good fellow, you've been reading and

hearing about these unfortunate vessels till you've got nervous. You may depend upon it my father looks well after his vessels. Why, just consider what his loss is when a ship founders or meets with accidents."

"Not much of a loss when it's well insured."

"Vessels are never insured to their full value, nor anything like it, as a rule. What do you want me to do?"

"What do I want you to do?" echoed the man, in a tone of suppressed anger; "will you let this vessel go to sea in her present state? Will you send brave men to risk a certain danger? I tell you, Christian Hilliard, the *Eglantine* is no more fit for sea than yon rotten hulk on the shore."

Christian's anger began to rise.

"Do you mean to accuse my father of sending ships to sea in an unseaworthy state? You had better mind what you are about, my fine fellow!"

"I accuse Mr. Hilliard of nothing; I only tell you a plain fact. The *Eglantine* is unsafe, and the men know it. They have spoken to the captain, but either he is ignorant, or playing into Mr. Hilliard's hands. He declares the ship is all right, but we—but the men know better."

"But *we*," repeated Christian. "Then you are one of the crew?"

"Yes, I am. Are you going home to-night?"

"Not I; much too far."

"Then will you make inquiries about the *Eglantine* to-morrow? Mr. Grant surveyed it,

and he knows his business. Will you ask your father for his letter—I know he wrote one—and judge by what he says?”

“I’ll see Grant’s letter certainly, and if it will be any comfort to you to see it too, or hear its contents, you shall. There, will that satisfy you?”

“It will satisfy you, sir, I think,” replied the man, significantly. “Mr. Hilliard, I believe you are a good man, and I put the lives of the crew of the *Eglantine* into your hands. On you now rests the responsibility. Are you willing to take it?”

“Where have you men got this idea?” asked Christian, evading the question. “This idea of the *Eglantine’s* unseaworthiness, I mean?”

“I scarcely know who first started it, but it has been floating about some time. We did not believe the repairs were extensive enough, but waited to see what sort of a cargo would be shipped. If a light one, we should have risked the voyage without a word. Sailors are, as a rule, unwilling to speak against their ships, and the *Eglantine* has been a good one in her day. But just go down to the docks to-morrow morning, and look at her yourself. Talk about coffin ships, I think you’ll see one then, sir.”

“Have you been drinking a drop too much?” asked Christian, half amused, half annoyed.

The man fired up at the question. “No, sir; not one drop has touched my lips to-day,” he answered, indignantly. “Is a poor man never

to speak a word in defence of his life, and of his mates' lives, but he's to have the charge of drunkenness flung at him?"

"Well, it was too bad, certainly," confessed Christian, good-naturedly. "I'll see about the *Eglantine*, my man, and if she is unfit for sea, she shall not go. My father will be here early to-morrow, and I'll talk to him about it."

"You'll have to do more than talk about it, I'm thinking," said the man, grimly. "Your father isn't one to be easily talked over."

"Never you mind; if the *Eglantine* is not fit for sea, she won't go," replied Christian, sharply. "You'll trust my father's word, I suppose?"

There was no reply.

"Well," said Christian, irritated at the silence, "you will trust Grant's word?"

"Yes, sir, certainly. No one knows better than Mr. Grant when a ship is sound and safe. If he says the *Eglantine* is sound, me and my mates will go with her willingly."

"That's a comfort," said Christian sarcastically. "I'll come down to the docks to-morrow, and set your mind at rest. Good-night."

The man touched his hat respectfully, and turned down one of the narrow streets leading to the sea, and Christian Hilliard hurried on towards his snug bachelor lodging. His father's house was six or seven miles out of town, and he kept these rooms for his own convenience.

"No use sending the poor beggars to sea in

that miserable state of mind," he said to himself. "I'll get this Grant's letter from the pater, and read it to them. It's bad enough to go to sea at all, to be off the land for months, without having the fear of rotten planks between them and the salt water. Overladen, too! there may be some truth in that. I fancy a great many vessels are overladen now-a-days. Well, I will see about it to-morrow, and if it is a case of overloading, out the cargo shall come, or my name isn't Christian Hilliard."

Report for once did not err when it called Christian Hilliard a good man. Character must tell, and make its own mark on the world, and his pure life and innate nobility had not passed unheeded. Where the father's name was mentioned with at best a doubtful shrug, the son's was spoken with respect and often affection, and not a man in Mr. Hilliard's employ but would have rejoiced if Christian had taken upon himself the oversight of his father's affairs. But he disliked shipping, and had a hatred of ropes and tar. There was but one in the world whom Richard Hilliard loved as he loved his gold, and that was his only son. So he gave way to the boy's fancies, and sent him abroad with a liberal allowance to see the world, hoping that when the wild oats were sown, he would return and settle down. Very few, however, were the wild oats sown by Christian. He had passed unscathed through the dissipated capitals of the Continent, viewed with

dreamy indifference the pastimes of a pleasure-loving world, and returned to his old home with no taint of evil clinging to the purity of his name and nature. Passionate to an extreme, generous to a fault, he not only won, but kept, the love of all with whom he had to do, and the friendly, genial manner gathered round him friends on every side.

It was not without much thought and consideration that the crew of the *Eglantine* had resolved to place their interest, even their lives, in his hands, and they waited the result with confidence. Christian Hilliard had never yet been known to break his word, and his influence with his father was great. If any one could prevent the *Eglantine* from going to sea in her present state it was he ; and they trusted to him to do it.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

IT was a cold, dreary morning, with a drizzling rain falling fast and thick on land and sea. A group of sailors stood at the corner of one of the narrow streets leading up from the docks to the town—men of the ordinary sailor type, rough and easy and good-humoured. But the good-humoured element was not so conspicuous as usual ; most of them looked excited, some angry.

A handsome carriage, drawn by a couple of bays, came down the street, and they stood aside as it passed, its wheels splashing mud and water over them.

“There he goes !” said one of the men ; “look at him sitting in his grand carriage, dashing the dirt over us ! A great deal he cares about rotten timber, so long as he gets his money. I should like to send you out in the *Eglantine*, Richard Hilliard ! I wonder how you’d feel ?”

“Send him out with Old Nick for his captain,” said another, with an oath. “Look you here, Ned Cairns, I haven’t got much faith in your young Hilliard—like father, like son.”

"Nothing of the sort. Mr. Christian Hilliard is a good man, and one who keeps his word. I'll trust him, if you won't," replied Cairns; "I knew him when he was a boy, and a better-hearted youngster never breathed."

The occupant of the carriage, ignorant of the remarks, though not unobservant of the unfriendly glances of the men, alighted at his office door. Captain Thorpe stood inside the doorway chaffing the clerks. As Mr. Hilliard came in he stood on one side, and exchanging the ordinary greeting, followed him into his private room.

"I am glad you have been able to come, Mr Hilliard," he said, as that gentleman motioned him to a seat; "writing isn't a satisfactory way of settling business, especially of this sort."

"What sort?" demanded Mr. Hilliard, sharply.

"About the *Eglantine*," replied Captain Thorpe, opening his eyes at the shipowner's tone; "the men are in open rebellion. Have you got Grant's letter handy?"

"Did you receive *my* letter this morning?"

"Yes."

"I think I told you in it that Grant's letter merely contained a list of necessary repairs."

Captain Thorpe shook his head.

"I told the men so, sir, but they won't take my unsupported word. Perhaps if *you* were to speak to them——"

It was only a suggestion thrown out as a feeler, but Mr. Hilliard ignored it.

"The men are a set of fools!" he said angrily; "don't give way to them."

"They are not all fools. Cairns is a sensible man, and a trustworthy seaman."

"If they are not fools, they are probably worse. You must make them go; the ship is ready to sail, and sail she shall."

Captain Thorpe's anger rose.

"I cannot force them to go, Mr. Hilliard."

"Indeed!" was the significant reply.

"I suppose such things have been done," went on the captain; "but I for one should not care to put out to sea with a forced crew. If they come willingly, well and good; if not, get another crew."

"Where?" asked Mr. Hilliard, sarcastically.

"Ah, that's the difficulty; sailors fight shy of a ship with a bad name."

"I should like to know who gave the *Eglantine* a bad name."

"Well, Mr. Hilliard, she is very old, and some of the men who were with her on her last voyage remember in what a dilapidated condition she was, and how rotten some of the timbers were."

"What has that got to do with her now? hasn't she been well repaired?"

Captain Thorpe made no reply, and at that moment the door opened, and Christian Hilliard came in. Young and handsome, with the unmistakable impress of his upright, honourable

nature on his face, he formed a striking contrast to his father and the weather-beaten captain.

"You are engaged, sir?" he said, glancing at his father's preoccupied face.

"No, I am not," was the quick reply. "Captain Thorpe, will you kindly obey my instructions to the letter? I have nothing more to say about it."

"I will come and tell you the result," said the captain, rising reluctantly. "I am afraid it will be different from what you expect, sir."

"Do your part, and if that is not sufficient, I will do mine," said the shipowner, coldly.

"Well, Christian."

"That's Captain Thorpe, isn't it?" said his son, gazing out of the window after the departing captain. "Has he been about that row?"

"What row?" asked Mr. Hilliard, wondering what he knew about it.

"Among the crew of the *Eglantine*. They say the ship isn't seaworthy."

"*They* say a great many things for which there is no foundation. As a rule *they say* is a liar."

Christian laughed. "Right you are, sir; and yet it is a power in the land. Did Thorpe tell you what gave rise to this report?"

"He knows about as much as you do, I suppose. There is a report, and the men are making the most of it. What have you heard?"

In reply, he gave his father an account of his interview on the previous night,—gave it in a

half-laughing, half-serious way, which was little guide to his real feeling.

Mr. Hilliard listened in silence. A slight frown crossed his face as his son spoke of his promise to show Grant's letter to the men, and Christian's quick eye caught it.

"You will have no objection, sir, will you?" he asked, pausing in some surprise.

"Certainly! I should not think of showing it to them. Things have come to a pretty pass if I am always to show written proof of the truth of my word. You should not have promised."

Christian whistled: it was a habit of his when he was perplexed or annoyed.

"That's awkward," he said at last, seating himself on the table. "Where is the letter?"

"At home," said Mr. Hilliard, off his guard. The next moment he would have given much to recall the words.

"Look here, sir; it won't compromise your dignity in the least if I take the letter and just read it to the men. Hilliard son and Hilliard father are two distinct individuals—and a precious good thing that they are," he added with a smile. "Hilliard son does not do much to carry on the honour of the house! But, seriously, sir, you cannot possibly object to my reading it to them on my own responsibility; your name shall not be brought into the affair at all."

"I do object most strongly, Christian; the letter is in my possession, and the fact of your

reading it to them proves that I must have given it to you ; therefore, I am bound to be brought in."

" Well, sir, there is but one way out of the difficulty that I can see," said Christian, suddenly, after a short silence ; " I must read the letter myself, and then repeat the contents to the men. I think they will take my word for its correctness."

" Why should they take your word when they refuse to take Thorpe's ? "

" Because, as I learned in the days of old, familiarity breeds contempt," was the good-humoured rejoinder. " They know Thorpe ; they don't know me personally,—at least not much. It's the way of the world. I promised to see the men to-day. What time are you going home ? "

" I cannot stay long ; my leg is painful to-day. I shall return before noon."

" That will suit me well. I'll come with you, see the letter, and ride back in the evening."

" You can come with me if you like, but as to seeing the letter, that's another thing."

The last words Christian did not hear : catching sight of a friend passing he dashed out in pursuit, heedless of the fast-falling rain, and in his haste nearly tumbled over Captain Thorpe.

" Hullo!" he cried, stopping short ; " I'm coming to pay you a visit this evening, Captain Thorpe. I'm going to speechify to your men."

" What about, Mr. Christian ? "

" I shall take the *Eglantine* for a text, and

discourse about rigging and spars, and planks and masts," was the laughing reply. "I'm going to hunt up a nautical dictionary, and make sure of my sea terms."

"Pity the father isn't more like the son!" thought the Captain, as he walked on. "That young fellow has some splendid stuff in him, I can see. I wonder what he has to say to the men? Mr. Hilliard will give him Grant's letter to read to them, I suppose."

The rain was still falling fast when Christian returned to the office. The carriage was waiting at the door, but Mr. Hilliard was engaged. Two or three sailors were lounging near, watching the action of the bays, and commenting on the livery of the servants.

"I say, mate, what'll you take for your petticoats?" said one, touching the footman's long coat with his stick. "Uncommon comfortable thing in a nor'-wester."

The man, who was a Londoner, vouchsafed no reply, but moved nearer the carriage door with a look of supreme contempt.

"Did you ever hear of a port called Hanwell?" went on Cairns, winking at his companions. "They'd be very glad to have you there, mate. It's where the poor chaps go who are a button short; and as you have a few to spare, lor' they'd welcome you with open arms."

A roar of laughter followed this speech, and the footman turned red with anger; the more so

because his young master stood in the shelter of the office doorway, evidently enjoying the chaff.

The next moment Cairns, too, caught sight of him, and touched his cap. "Beg your pardon : didn't know you were there, sir."

"All right," said Christian, stepping into the outer office, which was empty, the clerks having gone to their dinner ; "just step this way a moment, I want to speak to you."

Cairns followed him, looking somewhat embarrassed.

"You are the man who spoke to me last night. How is it you are not on board ?"

"Nothing to do, sir. The *Eglantine* is ready for sea, and unless something is done, she will sail in a day or two."

"Why have you not spoken before ? Why have you left it to the last minute in this way ?"

"We didn't leave it, Mr. Christian. As soon as we knew the repairs hadn't gone far enough, we spoke to Captain Thorpe, and he promised to see Mr. Hilliard, and have it attended to at once. He's been keeping us on and off these last few weeks, just playing with us, and at last we got desperate, and took the affair into our own hands. I've been waiting about for you all the morning."

"Well, I have nothing to say to you now. I am coming down to the docks this evening, and will put things to rights then. I thought you'd be on the look-out all day."

One of the inner doors opened, and Mr. Hilliard came out. He glanced at Cairns, and paused as if he would have spoken, but changed his mind and passed on.

"I'm going to have a talk over it with my father, and see Grant's letter," said Christian. "I shall ride down to the docks this evening, so look out for me, and don't run off to the 'Three Sails.'"

He spoke the last words in jest, and Cairns laughed.

"No fear, sir ; we are too anxious for that."

Mr. Hilliard was twice as long as usual over the dinner-table that evening. Christian yawned, and stretched his long limbs, and gave various other signs of weariness, but still his father deliberately sipped his old port, and took no notice. At last he pushed back his chair, and Christian sprang to his feet.

"Now for this *Eglantine* affair," he said, opening the door. "Come along, sir, into your sanctum sanctorum."

"I've told you all there is to tell about the *Eglantine*," replied his father, coolly taking up the evening paper.

"Yes, but Grant's letter, you know ; I want to see it. It is here, somewhere, I suppose ; can I get it ?"

There was no help for it ; the moment had come either for an evasion of the question, or for a direct refusal to show the letter. Mr. Hilliard chose the latter.

"It is strange, Christian, that you cannot understand my objection to have that letter read or repeated to those men. I tell you again it contains a list of repairs necessary to make the *Eglantine* seaworthy ; let that be sufficient."

"But I have given my word," said Christian, a shade of annoyance crossing his handsome face. "What on earth can I say to the men? They are expecting me to give them proof as to the ship's seaworthiness, and I must do it."

Mr. Hilliard made no reply.

"Surely you cannot object to give me the letter to read, if I merely repeat the contents to them."

"I utterly refuse to have anything at all to do with it. If you choose to encourage the men in their rebellion, do so ; I shall be no party in the matter."

"It is not rebellion, sir ; they think the ship is rotten, and surely they have a right to demand proof that she is not so. I am sorry if I have acted contrary to your judgment, but it is too late to speak of that now. As I have given them my word, they are depending upon me, and I feel bound in honour to satisfy them."

Mr. Hilliard continued reading the paper.

"It is very annoying," continued Christian, with irritation. "If I had had the slightest idea that you would object, I would not have promised."

"You know nothing of the business, and should not have interfered."

The word "interfered" jarred on Christian's ear.

"It was scarcely that, sir," he answered, coldly. "The men asked me to prove the truth of my father's word, and is it likely I should refuse?"

"I can take care of my own honour."

"Certainly, when you know it is at stake, which I presume you did not in this case."

"My honour is not in the keeping of a rascally crew."

"I cannot understand you," said Christian, rising and pacing the floor. "These men risk their lives in a perfectly sound vessel, and it is natural that they should wish to have their safety guaranteed as far as possible. By the way, that fellow said he had written to you; have you had a letter?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Threatened to complain to a magistrate."

"Stupid fellow! why didn't he see me first. Well, what am I to say to them to-night?"

"Just what you please."

"Shall I, on your authority, tell them that Grant's letter was an assurance of the *Eglantine's* seaworthiness, under certain conditions, which have been fulfilled?"

"If you like."

Christian grew impatient. "Will you, as a personal favour to me, your son, let me read Grant's letter?"

"I have already said no."

"Is that your final decision?"

"It is."

Christian opened the door and left the room. "Confound it!" he exclaimed angrily, "here's a nice fix for a fellow to be in. How am I to keep my word to these men?"—a question which kept his thoughts fully occupied on his way to the docks. Cairns was leaning over the side of the *Eglantine*, evidently on the look-out.

"Where's Captain Thorpe?" asked Christian.

"Down below, sir; shall I call him?"

"No, I'll go down." Diving into the cabin, he found the Captain busy with his chart. "Captain Thorpe," he said abruptly, "are you aware of the contents of Grant's letter to my father?"

Captain Thorpe opened his eyes. "I only know what your father told me. I have not seen it, I wish I had; the men would be satisfied then, perhaps."

"You have every confidence in the vessel's soundness, I suppose."

"I have your father's word for it."

"And that satisfies you?"

"Yes."

"Will you come on deck while I speak to the men?" Captain Thorpe rose and followed him in silence. The men were gathered together, quietly talking, but as Christian appeared, they turned towards him with expectant looks.

"My men," he began in the cool, deliberate way habitual to him, "I made a promise to one of you last night, which I am unable to

keep. I promised to repeat the contents of a certain letter to you, but it is not in my power to do so. Not one of you regrets this as I do. Nevertheless, I have something to tell you about this ship. Are you prepared to believe my word?"

There was a whispered consultation among them, and some altercation. At last Cairns stepped forward, cap in hand. "Sir, Mr. Christian, they want to know who is your authority for what you are going to say."

"My father's word is my authority," said Christian proudly, a flush rising to his face. "I am prepared to pledge my honour as to the truth of all I say."

"It ain't no use, sir," said another of the men, sullenly. "We would take your word for anything you had seen yourself, but if you only tell us what Mr. Hilliard tells you, we won't, and there's an end of it."

"Haven't you seen the letter, sir?" asked Cairns, respectfully.

"No ; my father thinks his word ought to be sufficient."

"He said the *Pearly Spray* was sound," cried a voice from behind Cairns. "He said the *Island Flower* was seaworthy, and her planks were that rotten, you could pull them to pieces with your nails. He vowed the *Wallace* was properly repaired, and sent her to sea with a cargo, when she ought to ha' been chopped up for firing. She

went down, and so did the others. No, no, sir, we ain't going to take Mr. Hilliard's word ; he's sent too many to Davy's locker."

Christian's indignation rose hot and strong. "Take care what you are saying, my man. Many have seen the inside of a prison for less than that."

"It's true, every word of it, and I'll stick to it. Ask your father where the *Seabird* is ; ask him where the others are. It's an easy thing to send a rotten ship to sea. Sailors lives ain't worth counting, so as the masters get their money. If you believe the ship is sound, go in her yourself."

"Ay, let him go in her himself," murmured the men, with lowering looks. "He'll take precious good care he don't tread her planks."

"If I do go, will you trust my father's and Captain Thorpe's word ? Will you do your part, and take your places like men ?" asked Christian, with the light of a sudden resolve in his honest eyes.

"Ay, ay, sir. If you will trust your life, we can trust ours."

"Then I will go !" said Christian, and the men looked at each other in silence.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE rain had ceased, and the low West was a sea of golden glory. The dark clouds flushed into rosy beauty, and the cold, grey waves grew warm in the glowing brightness. In the fulness of the evening light stood Christian Hilliard, the gleams from the setting sun shining on his rich brown hair and sunburnt face. The rough sailors looked at him in astonishment, and then a murmur of satisfaction rose from their midst. "It ain't likely he'd go if he knew the planks were rotten," they said. "Old Hilliard would take good care he didn't send his only son to sea in any but a safe ship."

Cairns stepped forward, his face glowing with honest admiration. "Do you really mean that, Mr. Christian?"

"I do; if my presence will be any guarantee of the soundness of the vessel, you shall have it."

It was not without an effort that he said the words. A voyage in this uncomfortable, disreputable-looking vessel was not at all to his fastidious taste, and his unconquerable dislike to all the

unpleasant evils of a small merchant ship was stronger than ever ; but he was not one to let inclination take precedence of duty. He had promised to give some satisfactory proof of the *Eglantine's* seaworthiness, and this was absolutely the only means left him of doing so. At one moment the thought had crossed him of going to Grant, and asking the result of his survey ; but he was in London, and there was no time to write to him, even if he had made up his mind to do so. The course of action he had adopted was the only one that would have the desired effect, to prove to the crew that he thoroughly believed the *Eglantine* to be seaworthy.

“What do you say, mates ?” said Cairns, turning towards them. “Will you go if the young master goes with us ?”

“He don’t know anything about vessels,” shouted the man who had expressed his wish to send Mr. Hilliard to sea with Old Nick. “He don’t know a rotten plank from a sound one.”

“That is not the question,” said Christian calmly. “I do not know much about such things, I confess, but the question is this : Will my presence be sufficient proof that my father has good reason to believe the ship to be seaworthy ? Yes or no.”

“Yes,” was the ready answer.

“Then I shall go with you, and let us hope for a quick voyage, for I’m not fond of the sea, my men. It hasn’t served me well in my time.”

There was a comical look in his brown eyes as he spoke, and the men laughed outright. "Three cheers for the young master!" they cried, and the air rang with the shout.

"He won't go, not he!" said the only one who had refused to join in the cheer. "Wait till he gets home and tells his father what he's done! he'll hear some'ut more then about the *Eglantine*. His father ain't told him everything."

At the insulting words Christian's hot blood was roused. "Who is that man?" he asked imperatively. "Step here a moment."

The man came forward, with a look of dogged resolution on his rugged face.

"Do you wish for a discharge?" asked Christian quietly. The cool, self-possessed tone had its effect, and the man was subdued.

"Not if you really do go 'long with us," he answered, after a moment's pause; "I reckon we may trust the old ship then. Your father knows what he's about."

"Well," thought Christian, as he rode slowly up the pleasant road leading to the open country, "I'm booked for a voyage! I wonder what Maud will say to it." A smile lightened the thoughtfulness of his face as he turned up a narrow carriage-drive leading to a pretty rose-covered villa. At one of the low windows stood a girl, with a face lovely as a poet's dream. Rich masses of soft brown hair swept back from the low, white forehead, and large, dreamy eyes, of

almost southern light and warmth, looked up from beneath the long lashes with a glad welcome at the approaching visitor.

"Late again, sir!" she said, with a sunny smile. "I was just going to put on my hat and go out."

"Were you?" said Christian, sceptically; "I wonder which way you would have gone; down the Limerick Road, I suppose."

"Indeed, I should not," was the instant reply; "I should have gone in exactly the opposite direction."

Christian laughed: Limerick Road was the one, he usually came by. Riding round to the side of the house, he gave his horse in charge of a boy, and returned to the window. "Are you alone, Maud?" he asked, stepping into the pretty little room. "Your father is out, of course, but where is your mother?"

"They are all out," said Maud, the rich bloom mounting to her beautiful face as, laying his hands on her bare white shoulders, he held her at a little distance, looking at her with undisguised admiration. "Mamma has not been well all day, and papa thought a drive would do her good. They have gone to Westbrook."

"So much the better; I shall have you all to myself for an hour."

"Any one would imagine, from your injured tone, that you never saw me except in company with the whole family," was the saucy reply.

"What is the matter, Christian? You look as if something had annoyed you."

"So it has, dear. I don't know what you will say when I tell you."

"Be quick!" she said, raising her laughing eyes to his handsome face. "I was always famous for my impatience; don't keep me in suspense, there's a dear boy. What is it? Has your favourite horse broke his leg, or has Tycho gone mad? Nothing less could bring that cloud to your face."

"It's less in one way, because nobody is hurt, but in its consequences it may be more to you and me. I'm going abroad, little one—going to Quebec. What say you to that?"

"Christian! then it is you, not Tycho, who has gone mad! What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry to say my meaning is only too plain. I have been down to the docks and booked myself for a voyage in the *Eglantine*—a dirty, black, tarry hulk, only fit for the infernal regions," he replied, with a look of disgust at the recollection. "I think I've been a fool, Maud, but as usual I acted on impulse, and of course did the very thing I ought to have avoided."

Drawing her down by his side he told her of his promise to the men, and of his father's refusal to let him see the all-important letter. "What else could I do under the circumstances, darling?" he said, in conclusion. "I was bound to satisfy the men, and that was the only way left. You

and I have cause to know what my father is : he never changes his mind."

For three years Christian Hilliard had loved this brown-haired Maud with a passionate love such as few men are capable of feeling. Three long years they had been, and now at the end of them the future looked no brighter, for Mr. Hilliard still withheld his consent, and Mr. Ingleton, Maud's father, angry and indignant, spoke seriously of breaking off the engagement entirely. But Christian had pleaded for a little longer grace. "I will try my father again," he said, "and if he still refuses, I will leave him, and get some employment, and win a home for my wife. It shall not go on like this much longer." They were no idle words, Mr. Ingleton knew, and so he held his peace, waiting for Christian to act. And Christian waited a propitious moment. "I must take my father in a good mood," he said ; "I must speak when a vessel has made an extra lucrative voyage." The time had come, he thought, when this unfortunate affair of the *Eglantine* had turned up, and now Mr. Hilliard was in one of his worst possible moods ; angry with Christian, with Captain Thorpe, and with the men of the *Eglantine*.

"What will he say about this new scheme of yours ?—it cannot be called scheme, though," said Maud ; "this Quixotic attempt to protect his honour, I ought to say."

"Quixotic ?" echoed Christian, reproachfully.

"Maud, is that what you call it? I own I was hasty in the first place in promising to show them Grant's letter, and yet even now I cannot blame myself for doing so. It seems the most natural thing I could do under those circumstances. That my father would object never once entered into my head; why should he object? It is only that confounded pride of his that comes in the way. My darling, don't you think with me, that something ought to be done to set those poor fellows' minds at rest? Do you think we, as shipowners, have a right to force men to go in a ship which they fear is not seaworthy?"

"Certainly not, Christian, and yet I cannot bear for you to go in the *Eglantine*. If anything is wrong——"

"Maud!" interrupted Christian, hastily, "do you think what you are saying? What can be wrong with the *Eglantine*? Has not Grant, a man who thoroughly understands his business, pronounced her perfectly safe?"

Maud was silent: she could not bear to speak the thought that would force itself upon her reluctant mind—"But you have only your father's word as to the contents of Grant's letter."

"Why don't you see Mr. Grant?" she asked at last.

"Because he is in London at present: has been there for some months. He is very ill, they say—not likely to live, poor fellow!"

"Why don't you get some one else to survey

the ship?" she said, suddenly; "that would obviate every difficulty."

"Little goose!" laughed Christian; "do you think a vessel can be examined when she is loaded? You don't deserve to marry a ship-owner."

"Very well, then, I won't do it. I'll ask some one else to have me."

"Do, dear," said Christian, calmly. "Ask some one, and then tell me what he says. I shall speak to my father before I go, Maud."

She looked up with troubled eyes. "Christian, I *know* he will never consent."

"Then we must do without his consent," he answered, a shade passing over his face. "Perhaps he will think better of it by the time I come back."

"Must you go? Is there no other way of settling it all? I wish you had not promised."

"My dear, I was obliged to. I could not hear all they were saying about my father, and not take some step in the matter. I could not show them the letter, so I did the sole remaining thing—said I'd go with them. It was the only way of protecting my father's good name and keeping my own word."

"Yes, I suppose it was, but it is not right, Christian: your father ought to have given them the proof they asked, it was a little enough thing."

"Yes," he answered reluctantly, "I suppose he

ought, dear." It went against the grain to condemn his father, even to her, for he had always been kind and indulgent to him, humouring his whims, and giving way to his capricious fancies as few parents would have done. Only in this one matter of his engagement to Maud Ingleton had he ever crossed him, and Christian was not without hope that even in this he would yield.

It was later than usual when he left Mr. Ingleton's house that night. He rode quickly along the deserted roads, his thoughts dwelling anxiously upon the impending interview with his father.

"I wonder what he'll say," he murmured. "Surely he cannot object to what I have done now. I cannot help it if he does : I have given my word."

That was enough, he had given his word. People sometimes wondered where Christian Hilliard had got his chivalrous ideas of honour. Not from his father, certainly, for he proverbially believed in being all things to all men, that is to say, among his equals and in the way of business. Few men knew better how to look after his own interests than he, and he looked with a contemptuous pity upon men who would allow an over-strained sense of honour to stand in the way of some lucrative business transaction. The fact was, he could not understand such men ; they were out of his world. His son Christian was often a source of wonderment to him, and yet in him he could trace the characteristics of his

mother's house ; for the rich shipowner had married out of his own rank, and had placed at the head of his establishment the fair-haired patrician daughter of an ancient but impoverished house, and from her Christian had inherited not only his personal beauty, and the indolent grace and ease of manner peculiar to her order, but the high integrity and sense of honour which stamped his character, and won for him universal respect.

Mr. Hilliard sat at his desk, busy with calculations and accounts. It was an anxious time just then, and he gave up most of his evenings to business. He did not look up as his son entered, and Christian silently drew a chair to the table and sat down. He was in no hurry to speak, though he felt that it would be a relief to have the interview over. At last Mr. Hilliard closed his book and looked up.

"Rather late, isn't it?" he said, pushing back his chair, and glancing at the clock. This was the usual signal for going to bed. Christian refused to recognize it.

"It is late, but I have been detained. Well, father, don't you wish to know the result of my visit to the docks?"

For a moment Mr. Hilliard hesitated: he did wish very much to know what course the men were taking; not that he feared much trouble in the matter, for he knew he should have already received notice from Captain Thorpe had the men proved obstinate, but he wanted to know how

Christian had quieted them. With concealed anxiety he replied, "I suppose the crew have come to their senses."

"I don't know about that: some of them are not over-burdened with sense at the best of times, and some of them seem to have a pretty fair share; but I don't think either have returned to their senses, for the simple reason that they have never left them. They are all in their right mind now, at any rate."

"It is a bad precedent, to side with the men against the master, Christian," said his father coldly.

"That's the very thing I've not done! You should have heard me talk to them, sir," replied Christian, determined that nothing should make him lose his temper. "They only want a little management, and they are as gentle as lambs. I like sailors; they are such an honest, straightforward class of men. You say I am not cut out for a shipowner; now I think I am. I can always get on with sailors; there's something in me they take to, and something in them I take to. That's fair, isn't it? What you call reciprocity of sentiment."

"Did Thorpe send any message to me?"

"No: he seems a good sort of fellow; we shall get on all right together, I think. What is the etiquette of merchant ships, sir? The captain stands first, I suppose, no matter who is on board? Well, we shan't quarrel about that."

"Who won't quarrel?"

"Thorpe and I. I am going with the *Eglantine* to Quebec; it was the only way of satisfying the men."

"You are going to Quebec in the *Eglantine*!" repeated Mr. Hilliard slowly, gazing at his son like a man in a dream.

"Yes; pleasant prospect, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

Christian looked up in surprise at the tone. "I was bound in honour to satisfy the crew," he answered quietly. "You refused to let me do so in the way I wished and intended, so I was forced to accept the only alternative. The crew said my presence would be a sufficient guarantee of the vessel's soundness, and that if I went they would trust themselves with me."

"On what grounds? You know nothing of ships."

"No, but you do. My going proves that I believe the ship to be seaworthy, and they know that you are my warrant for the belief. Is not that sufficient security? Why, it is really more satisfactory than showing them Grant's letter. They know I would not trust my precious life to rotten planks."

"Christian, are you mad?" cried his father angrily. "I never heard such a wild, insane idea in my life."

"Nevertheless it was absolutely the only thing left for me to do."

"It was nothing of the kind. The men would

have gone fast enough without that. They would not be the first crew who have rebelled and learned to their cost that ships are not playthings, and shipowners children. I would have taught them a lesson."

"How?"

"How! why by making the law force them to go. The choice lay between that or the prison, and you would have seen fast enough then how much their fears amounted to."

"I cannot agree with you, sir. It is entirely against my principles to force men into actions which their judgment condemns. I prefer my own way of satisfying them."

"And I prefer mine. You will not go on board the *Eglantine* with my consent," returned his father, growing pale with anger.

"I am sorry, sir," said Christian, his face flushing with annoyance. "I seem to be especially unfortunate in this affair. However, it is too late for argument: I have promised to go."

"Then you shall break your promise. You shall not go, I tell you, Christian!"

"Excuse me," said Christian, with the quiet courtesy he never lost, even though his father tried his patience sorely, "I must go: it is no matter of choice now, unless indeed, you prefer showing Grant's letter. I suppose that would serve them."

"Hang Grant's letter!" retorted his father furiously; "they shall never see it, and you shall not go!"

Christian rose. "It is worse than useless to argue, sir," he said gravely; "I am not accustomed to break my word."

"No, nor to pay common respect to your father. If you go with the *Eglantine* you will no longer be a son of mine. I forbid your going."

They stood opposite each other, the father and son, both equally determined and resolute. For some moments they were silent, for a fearful suspicion was forcing itself on Christian's mind. Scarcely daring to face his father, he turned his head in another direction. "What is your reason for objecting so strongly to my going?" he asked.

"Reason enough. It is encouraging the men, it is defying my authority," replied Mr. Hilliard, almost beside himself with mingled terror and anger. "Once more, I forbid your going: do you hear?"

"Is there anything wrong with the *Eglantine*?" said Christian, under his breath, feeling like a traitor as he spoke, yet forced into speech by the overwhelming dread.

"Wrong with the *Eglantine*? What should be wrong with her?" answered his father, his voice sinking from its pitch of excitement, as he felt the necessity for self-control.

"Is she perfectly seaworthy?" asked Christian, looking full at his father's drooping eyes with his own honest, fearless ones.

"She is seaworthy."

"Then I shall go."

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

LONG after his son had gone upstairs, Mr. Hilliard sat in utter silence, his mind a chaos of conflicting feelings: rage, fear, doubt, indecision. One thing was certain—Christian would go in the *Eglantine* unless he took some instant step to prevent him. What could he do? Protest, argument, entreaty, would all go for nothing, he knew full well, and it was too late for diplomacy or stratagem. From his heart he cursed the “meddling fool” who had stopped his son that dark night, and told him the story of rotten planks and over-heavy cargo. For one moment the thought occurred to tell him the truth, and bind him to silence, but it instantly sank in the knowledge of its utter futility. To tell Christian the truth would be to unload the *Eglantine*, and probably break her into pieces, besides exposing himself as an unscrupulous, dishonourable master, worse than careless of the heavy responsibility resting upon him. His imagination pictured the universal hatred and execration that would follow him all the days of his life; all the contempt and abhorrence that would be his portion for ever

after ; and regardless as he was of the opinion of others, he shrank with pitiable cowardice from the picture. Even had he the wish, he had not the moral courage to face the undisguised horror which a revelation of the truth would create ; he *dared not* attempt to retrieve the past. Bitterly now he regretted not *selling the Eglantine* ; breaking her up never once entered his mind, for his fears only, not his conscience, were touched. He had been a shipowner for nearly forty years, and had never yet broken up one of his vessels. The rotten ones had been caught by the fierce cyclone and scattered over the mad waters, or had been dashed upon rough Norwegian rocks, or far-off coral reefs, or had been sold to some equally unscrupulous but poorer shipowner, who had sent them out again to take their chance, with their freight of human lives, on the mighty deep, amid the wild storms of wind and wave.

Plan after plan suggested itself, but only to be rejected as useless. The wild thought of bribing Grant to write a reassuring letter was dismissed, as he remembered the man's dangerous illness and absence from home. To hire another surveyor who would guarantee a favourable verdict (he knew where such men were to be found) would also be of no avail, as the ship was loaded, and the men knew no thorough examination could be effected. Slowly passed the weary hours as the wretched man fought against the fatal truth : *He must sacrifice either his son's life or his own good*

name. Look which way he would, there was no other alternative. If he quietly ordered the *Eglantine* to be unloaded and repaired, or sold—supposing anyone would dare to buy her under such notorious circumstances—what would that be but a tacit acknowledgment that he had been on the point of sending to sea a vessel which he *knew* to be unseaworthy? It meant loss of commercial reputation, loss of moral character, or rather of the semblance of it, loss of influence and social position, and, what he dreaded more than all, the loss of his son's respect.

He could not do it. Large drops of perspiration rolled from his forehead, and his cold damp hands wandered nervously among the papers on the table. His face grew haggard, and worn, and old in the agony of mental conflict, and even Christian would hardly have recognized his usually stern, self-possessed father. He rose at last, and went upstairs. At his son's door he paused and listened. Not a sound was to be heard, and turning the handle softly, he stole quietly in. Drawing the curtain noiselessly aside, he let the cold grey light of early dawn fall on the bed. Christian lay asleep, his beautiful classic profile showing clear against the white pillow. There was a restful repose about the whole attitude that his father envied with a keen and bitter envy. Never before had he so painfully realized the gulf between them; the impassable barrier separating his old age, of dark deeds upon which the light of uprightness

had never shone, from this young life, with its stainless honour and truth.

There rose before him the vision of past years. He saw the boy in his happy childhood, when his grave, innocent eyes had touched the fount of feeling, and brought to his father's heart resolves for a better, truer future, a higher and nobler aim. He saw him at school, standing prominent among three hundred boys ; winning from them love and friendship, and from his masters respect and thorough regard. He remembered well his own pride in the boy's handsome patrician face and bearing ; his exultation on hearing the murmur of admiration among the visitors to the school as, in answer to his name, Christian Hilliard walked forward, time after time, amid the plaudits of his companions, to receive from the hands of some well-known statesman or noble lord the prizes which fell to his share. Then he thought of his college days, when his name had appeared high in the list of wranglers, and when still his character for chivalrous honour had won for him the knightly nickname, *Sans peur et sans reproche*.

He had always been proud of the boy, always loved him in a fashion of his own. He could scarcely believe that he might in a day or two look his last upon the one face his stern, hard nature had learned to love ; touch for the last time the hand whose cordial grasp he had that night spurned in anger. If the struggle had been

hot and fierce downstairs, it was hotter and fiercer as he stood by that silent, motionless form, with the peace of a conscience at rest on the quiet, dreaming face. Must his be the hand to seal the death-warrant? Must he be the one to voluntarily surrender to the pitiless waves this life so full of promise? What was the alternative? Disgrace and ignominy.

But was the *Eglantine* doomed? Was her wreck a certainty? The thought brought a gleam of hope. She might weather the waves yet; worse than she had done it. He could remember vessels whose condition was a disgrace to their owners, yet which had braved many a wild storm, and reached their haven in safety, then why not the *Eglantine*? His anxiety for Christian was making him weak and fearful in his old age. Eagerly he clung to the hope as a wrecked sailor from one of his own rotten ships might have clung to a floating spar. Surely the vessel might go safely to her destination, and if she sustained much damage on the voyage out, Christian would not let her come back. Heavy loss to himself there would be, of course, but for once the sense of it would sink in the presence of his son's safety; he could put up with a heavy pecuniary loss better than with the loss of his only son, or the forfeiture of the world's respect.

"So be it, then," he murmured to himself, "he must go and risk it." Slowly he turned and left the silent room. As he closed the door, it seemed

as if he shut out all light, and wrapped himself in the gloom of a dark and heavy shadow. He had made up his mind to let the *Eglantine* go, and what her fate would be *he knew not*.

The sun was shining brightly, and the morning air was fresh, and pleasant, and inspiriting, as Christian rode down to the docks. There was little time to spare, and there were many things to be seen to before the *Eglantine* sailed. His cabin must be fitted up somewhat more in accordance with the luxurious style to which he was accustomed. His rooms were marvels of artistic taste. In his wanderings in foreign lands he had gathered together many an almost priceless bit of statuary and rare old carving. His walls were hung with gems of the old masters, and lovely little modern landscapes, and idylls, and poems on canvas.

And yet he was no Sybarite ; his inherent love for the beautiful led him to surround himself with all that charms the eye, and suggests to an artist or poet mind ideal loveliness and grace ; but he could at will throw it all aside, and delight in the freedom of a Bohemian life ; in the charm of a bivouac on the banks of the Amazon, or the wild excitement of a chase on the Western Prairie. He was no slave to an effeminate love of ease and indolence, though the *dolce far niente* had a certain attraction and charm.

In the matter of a voyage in his father's black-looking craft he resolved to make the best of the

necessary evils, and render them as endurable as possible. Near his father's office he met Captain Thorpe.

"Well, Thorpe, how goes the world with you this morning?" he asked, reining in his horse. "I am coming to look at my quarters: I suppose you have some sort of a nook in which I can stow myself and my belongings."

"Then you really mean to come with us, Mr. Christian?" replied Thorpe, in a slight tone of incredulity.

"I suppose you won't believe it till we have fairly started," said Christian, "and then you will expect me to hail the first homeward-bound vessel and come back."

Captain Thorpe laughed. "Not you, sir! you are not the sort to turn back, once you have really taken anything in hand. The men are all on the look-out this morning."

"What for? Me? I'll go and show myself, then. Are they all right?"

"Well," said the captain, dubiously, "some of them have been grumbling and growling this morning. The fact is, they think you will back out at the last moment. Lucas has put the idea into their heads that your going is all a ruse to quiet them; that you never intended to go. He and Cairns pretty nearly came to blows over it last night."

"I'll soon show them whether it's a ruse or not. How long before you come down?"

"I'll follow you at once. I'm just going to leave a message here for Mr. Hilliard." Christian rode on, and Thorpe went into the office. As he came out some one touched his elbow. It was a shabby, nervous-looking little man, who had been standing at the office door for the last twenty minutes.

"Do you want me?" asked the captain, in his blunt, straightforward manner.

"Is Mr. Christian Hilliard going to Quebec in the *Eglantine*?" said the man, with nervous, trembling eagerness.

Thorpe looked at him curiously: "What do you want to know for?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," was the humble reply. "Mr. Christian has been very good to me, and—and——" He stopped, evidently not knowing how to excuse his apparent curiosity.

"Then why didn't you ask him yourself? you must have seen him talking to me a few minutes ago."

"But he didn't see me, sir, and I didn't like to force myself upon his notice, because he—he always gives me something," stammered the man confusedly.

"Well, you are something out of the common!" exclaimed the captain. "That would be most men's reason for doing the other thing. Yes, he's going in the *Eglantine*, sure enough: young men take strange whims into their heads now-a-days."

"But he has some reason, he must have some reason!" said the man, with growing excitement.

"I suppose he has," replied the captain, curtly; he did not care to discuss the real reason with this not over reputable-looking stranger. It would not do to give any wider publicity to the floating rumours concerning the *Eglantine*.

"Where has Mr. Christian gone now? Has he gone down to the docks—can I see him there?"

"Oh, oh!" said Captain Thorpe, sarcastically, "this is the man who didn't want to see him for fear he should give him something!"

The man shrank back as if he were stung, and the captain went on his way, swearing in pretty strong language at the "tricks of those confounded land sharks." He was in a very bad temper, and very little served to put him out. Some excitement prevailed among the crew of the *Eglantine* as Christian appeared.

"I told you so!" cried Cairns, triumphantly. "Now what do you say, mates?"

"Stow that," said Lucas roughly; "wait till you hear what he's got to say first. Maybe he's only come to sneak out of it."

Cairns turned to him with a look of contempt. "May be *you* want to sneak out of it," he retorted. "You're a beauty, you are! Look alive, mates, and if you see a white crow anywhere, give him *Mister* Lucas's compliments, and he'd be glad of

the loan of his best tail feather to wear in his Sunday-go-to-meeting hat."

At a glance Christian saw that the men were, as Thorpe had said, on the look-out for him. Taking no notice, he chatted with them till Captain Thorpe came, and then went to make his arrangements in the cabin.

"There, you see!" said Lucas, as he disappeared, "he ain't coming; he never said a word about it."

The men looked at Cairns, expecting him to answer; but he either did not hear, or, hearing, did not heed, and continued leaning idly over the side.

"Do you think he's coming, Cairns?" asked a boy about fourteen, the youngest of the crew.

"If you wait you'll see," was the only answer he got. They had not to wait long. Calling Cairns, the captain ordered him and another man to accompany Mr. Hilliard and bring down some of his things to the vessel. For the life of him Cairns could not resist the opportunity for a cut at Lucas.

"Come with us, mate," he said in an undertone, for Christian was close at hand. "The young master will likely give us the slip round some corner, and it's as well you kept your eye on him. I shouldn't wonder but there's a balloon waiting for him outside the harbour."

Lucas swore at him under his breath, and turned sullenly away.

Nearly all day Christian was busily engaged

superintending the arrangement of his various belongings. He took Maud down to show her his new quarters, and was much amused at the critical remarks freely made in rough sailor terms upon her beauty. It was not often they saw anything so fair as "Mr. Christian's sweetheart." He had taken her home, and returned for the last time to the docks, when he overtook his father slowly making his way toward the *Eglantine*. In answer to his son's pleasant greeting he merely nodded, keeping on his way in silence. Christian walked by his side, wondering what on earth brought him there. Surely he was not going to order Captain Thorpe not to sail with him on board! he was capable of even that in his present state of mind.

Close to the *Eglantine* they were forced to stop while the way was cleared. A truck had broken down, depositing its load of coal on the road, and men were rapidly shovelling it away. To go round it was out of the question, the mud being so thick. Close by stood Cairns, with a little girl in his arms—a delicate, fragile-looking child, with a sweet, patient little face.

"That's father's ship, Nannie," he was saying, pointing to the *Eglantine*. "Her with the red flag."

The child looked at it earnestly.

"It isn't very pretty, father," she said, hesitatingly, and Christian could not help smiling at the word.

Pretty, indeed ! it was one of the ugliest craft in the docks.

"Pretty is as pretty does : if she takes father out to Quebec, and brings him safe home again, you won't mind her being a bit black and ugly, will you, Nannie ? "

"Will you come home soon, father ? "

"That depends on a many things, dear ; I'll come back to my little maid as soon as the winds and waves will let me."

"Which way are you going, father ? "

"Right out yonder, where the sun is setting."

"It's so bright I can scarcely look at it," said the child, raising herself in her father's arms, and shading her eyes with her hand. "Are you going right out into the light ? Will you go far enough to see the gate ? "

"What gate, Nannie ? "

"It's out there, isn't it ? The Gate of Glory, you know, father."

"Where did you hear talk of such a gate, Nannie ? " said Cairns, with a somewhat puzzled look on his face.

"Why, it is in my hymn, father—'When sun sets in the West.' I should like to go with you into all that gold ! isn't it lovely ? "

"Shall I cut a piece out as I go through, and bring it home for you ? " asked Cairns, jokingly.

"You can't," said the child regretfully. "Besides, it would spoil the look."

Christian stepped forward.

"Is this your little girl, Cairns?"

"Yes, sir; she's the only one at home now. I've brought her to see father's ship."

"Take her on board and show her everything there is to be seen. You would like to know in what sort of a vessel father's going, wouldn't you?" said Christian, with a pleasant smile, which always won a child's heart.

"She's a little bit of a coward about the sea," said Cairns; "every time I go away she has a bit of a cry, because she thinks the big waves 'll swallow me up. Never you fear, Nannie; father 'll come back safe to his little maid, please God."

With a sudden movement Mr. Hilliard stepped over the coal and walked on, out of hearing.

With a few words to Cairns, and a bright new half-crown to the child, Christian followed him. Captain Thorpe was just coming off the vessel, and went back with his employer.

"I have come to have a look round before you sail," said Mr. Hilliard, in a strangely quiet tone. "I suppose you are all ready to start."

"Yes," replied the skipper; "we shall weigh anchor to-morrow morning, all being well, sir."

With a cold impenetrable face, Mr. Hilliard went over the vessel. Everything was in order, and he had occasion for not one suggestion. Why he had come he scarcely knew; he had felt impelled, by some resistless force, to see, it might be for the last time, the ill-fated *Eglantine*, and now he regretted yielding to it.

The sun had sunk deep into the west, leaving the ship cold, and dark, and lifeless, as he left the docks. Turning, he saw it lying in the shadow, and, with a shudder, looked away.

Was it his son's coffin lying there?

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

IT was a bright, clear, moonlight night, and Maud Ingleton walked to the garden gate for the last good-bye. Leaning on Christian's arm, she looked up with eyes not entirely undimmed with tears.

"Do you believe in presentiments, Christian?" she asked, with a slight quiver in her voice.

"Presentiments!" he echoed. "Not I. What have you got in that dear funny little head now?"

"Don't laugh at me," she entreated; "I cannot help it, Christian. I have had such a strange feeling on me all day."

"About this voyage of mine? Do you think anything is going to happen to me? Cheer up, my darling; I have been pretty nearly all over the world, and have come to no harm yet."

"Christian, why wouldn't your father show you that letter?" she cried passionately. "Why did he forbid your going? I know something is going to happen—I can feel it."

"My dear, what is likely to happen? It is the best season of the year for such a voyage, and Thorpe anticipates a capital sail. You get your

crochet and tatting, or whatever it is that comes under the head of trousseau, and the time will pass away quickly enough. I shall expect you to be quite ready for me by the time I come back. Mind, Maud, I shall not wait any longer then. This is a thing that concerns me alone, and not my father. If we could have had his consent, well and good ; but if not I shall take you without it. Come, dry up those tears, dear one, and give me a good-bye that I shall remember and think about every day and night till I see you again."

* * *

In the shadow of a doorway a man, with a letter tightly clasped in his trembling hands, stood waiting. One by one the lights went out in the windows ; one by one the passers-by disappeared from the quiet street. The moon rose over the distant hills like a huge ball of fire ; rose higher and higher in the clear heavens with a gradually silvering light, and still he waited.

The city clocks struck out the passing hours ; the low fall of the waves on the shore was the only sound of the silent night, for it was past midnight, and the city was asleep.

In the distance at last was heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and the almost wearied-out watcher roused himself.

"Here he is at last!" he murmured ; "I thought he'd never come."

With quick, hurried steps, Christian Hilliard—

for it was he—came up the street, and stopped at one of the doors. Taking out his latch-key, he was about to let himself in, when a timid touch on his arm made him turn quickly.

"What on earth are you doing here this time of night?" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "Is anything the matter?"

"I beg your pardon for intruding, sir," was the low, tremulous answer. "Will you please to read this when you get in? It won't take you long," he added, entreatingly.

"What is it? Here, Milby, where are you off in such a hurry?" cried Christian, as the man began to move away.

"I only wanted to give you that, Mr. Christian. I've been waiting here since dark. You will read it, won't you, sir?"

"Read it! of course I will. It was written to be read, I suppose. Come in and have a glass of something—wine, ale, anything you like."

"I'd rather not, sir; indeed I'd rather not. If you'd please to let me go, Mr. Christian."

"Go on, then," said Christian, good-humouredly. "I believe you're afraid I shall make you drunk. You are a teetotaler, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir; good-night, sir," said Milby, looking round with fearful eyes. "You won't let anyone know I wrote that, will you, Mr. Christian?"

"Of course not. There, make haste home to bed; I'm sure that is the best place for you." He put his hand in his pocket as he spoke, with the

ready generosity which was always prompting him to give of his abundance to those who had need. Seeing him do it, Milby almost fled down the street, and in a few moments was out of sight round the corner.

Christian went in and shut the door. Turning up the gas, he found a whole budget of letters lying on the table. They had come by the late evening post, and among them were some he had been anxiously expecting for days. Sitting down, he was soon absorbed in their contents, forgetting the lateness of the hour. In vain the clock warned him that morning was drawing near; there were answers to be written, and he must write them; there would be no time in the morning. Wearied out at last, he rose and swept the letters aside.

"That's done!" he murmured. "Now for bed, and my last sleep on shore."

He slept heavily and late. The sun was shining high in the heavens when he drew aside his curtains the next morning, and for a few minutes he stood in silence, watching the busy world below. A knock at the door roused him from the reverie into which he had fallen. One of the sailors had come for his portmanteau. He hurried down, and found Cairns waiting in the hall.

"The skipper sent me for your portmanteau, or anything else you wish to send on board, sir," he said, in an absent, preoccupied tone. There was a tired look about him which attracted Christian's attention.

"What is the matter, Cairns?" he asked, kindly; "you look as if you had been up all night."

"So I have, sir. It's the little maid; she has been very ill, and the doctor seemed rather queer about her. I asked him if she was going to die, but he said he hoped not yet."

"But it's very sudden, isn't it, Cairns? Is it the one I saw last night?"

"Yes, sir; it's Nannie. No, it ain't what you may call really sudden. You see, she's been in a sort of decline for the last year or two; just quietly fading away from us; and I suppose nothing can save her. I don't think she'll last much longer."

"Don't you think she will live till you come back?" asked Christian, with sympathy.

"Well, sir, the doctor says he thinks she will, and he ought to know more than me. She sticks to it that she's going: that's the queer part of it! —the child seems to know."

"Would you rather not go, Cairns?" said Christian. "Would you like to give up this voyage?"

Cairns shook his head. "No, sir, thank you. I should have to do something, get another ship, you see, and I mightn't find a berth on any of them short voyagers. I've had such a many frights about Nannie afore now."

He shouldered the portmanteau and went off, his usually bluff, hearty face subdued and saddened.

"Everybody has some trouble," thought Christian. "No one escapes in this world." He sat down at the breakfast-table, debating within him whether he should go and see his father or not. He had resolved not to go, feeling only too sure of the manner of his reception; but now that the starting-day had really come, he hesitated, his resolution wavering.

"I have plenty of time to ride over," he murmured. "It doesn't seem the right sort of thing to sail, for no one knows how long a voyage, without a word from him. I think I will go."

Mr. Hilliard sat at his lonely breakfast-table reading the paper. At every sound outside the house he started, looking up with anxious, expectant eyes. He looked haggard and worn, and the breakfast before him was untouched, the coffee and steak rapidly getting cold.

Up the drive, at last, dashed Christian's beautiful mare, her glossy coat gleaming in the sunshine. At the hall door she stopped of her own accord, arching her slender neck as if proud of the firm, cool hand on her rein. Giving her a pat, and an injunction to stand still till he came out again, Christian entered the house.

"Good morning, sir," he said, frankly extending his hand. "I have run over to wish you good-bye. The *Eglantine* sails this afternoon."

Mr. Hilliard looked coldly up. "You have given yourself needless trouble," he answered, ignoring his son's outstretched hand.

"I have still several things to see to before I go on board," said Christian, restraining a strong inclination to walk out of the room; "but I knew Lucrece would bring me here and back in a few minutes, so I had the saddle put on."

He stood before his father in his stately, gracious manhood, waiting with quiet dignity for the word or look of reconciliation, but waited in vain.

"If you can spare a few minutes, sir, I should like to speak to you on one or two subjects before I go," he said, patiently. "My time is very valuable."

"So is mine," was the brief reply.

"I know it, and I will not trespass upon it. What I have to say will only occupy a few minutes."

"Which I have not to spare," said Mr. Hilliard, rising from his seat.

"Then I will wish you good-morning. I am sorry if I have disturbed you," said Christian, with an expression half of annoyance, half of pain. Again he stretched out his hand, and after a moment's hesitation, Mr. Hilliard touched it with the tips of his fingers.

The door closed, and then he heard Lucrece galloping down the drive, and he was once more alone. Alone! and his only son on his way to a watery grave. Do what he would, he could not banish the thought. In vain he strove to comfort himself with the recollection of other vessels which had safely weathered the wild storms of the

Atlantic, and reached home unharmed, although they had been as unseaworthy as the *Eglantine*.

Taking his telescope, he went upstairs to a little room, from which he was accustomed to watch his vessels sail out of the docks. Slowly passed the weary hours as he waited and watched—watched for the black-hulled ship which was taking his son out among the dread perils of the deep. He knew she would not sail till late in the afternoon, and yet he sat at the open window, straining his eyes, tormented by the vague fear that she might in some unguarded minute pass, and he not see her.

She came at last ; her sails idly flapping in the scarcely perceptible breeze, her black hull blacker than ever, her dingy, battered figure-head giving flat contradiction to the sweet suggestiveness of her graceful name. Lower in the western sky sank the setting sun, shedding its flood of light upon the tranquil sea. And into the golden glory sailed the *Eglantine*, a fresh wind catching her sails and speeding her over the glittering waves. Like a dark speck she appeared, and was then gradually lost in the glowing west.

* * * * *

People observed that Richard Hilliard was growing more and more morose as the weeks went on. His clerks grew restive beneath the iron hand which held so stern a check upon them, and secretly hated the cold impenetrable face

which only appeared to herald reproof and withering sarcasm.

The bright, warm days gave place to wintry winds and biting frosts, or dreary fogs. News came that the *Eglantine* had reached her port in safety, after a quick and easy voyage, and was busy unloading. Richard Hilliard's heart grew lighter. "If she got there safely, why shouldn't she come back with equal safety?" he thought, and comforted himself with the thought. To one thing he made up his mind: he would sell the *Eglantine*, and never more run such a risk. Let him only see her back and safe in the docks, and she should not again sail out claiming him for her owner.

So he said to himself, and as the time passed he hardened himself more and more against the son who, to use his own words, had set his authority at defiance, and abetted the crew in their rebellion. More determinedly than ever he resolved to give no countenance to his engagement with Maud Ingleton, and to disown and disinherit him if he persisted in marrying an almost penniless girl. And while he was thus resolving and planning, Christian was on his way home, impatiently looking for the day when he should once more set foot on British soil.

"It is incomprehensible to me how anyone can deliberately choose a seafaring life," he said one day to Cairns. "Now, I suppose you really like it, and would rather be on sea than land."

"Well, yes, sir ; I think I would : we sailors get to look on the salt water as a sort of home, and a grand big one it is. I don't know but what we are better off than them who live in some of those little houses in towns. Sir, you haven't such a thing as a map with you, have you ?"

"A map ? What sort of one ?"

"One of them round 'uns that shows both sides of the earth ; I'd like to have a look at old England, and see how she lies to America."

"Let me see," mused Christian, "I ought to have one somewhere. I have an indistinct recollection of seeing it among my things. I'll have a look, Cairns."

"Thank'ee, sir ; don't trouble about it now, any time 'll do."

"No time like the present ; if I don't look now I shall forget it."

Hewent down into the cabin and opened his chest, turning out all the contents pell-mell on the floor.

"There's confusion !" he exclaimed ; "I want Maud here to put my things straight for me : women always manage that sort of thing better than we men. I don't know how it is, but I cannot keep my places tidy."

Folding one thing here and another there, in a hopeless indefinite sort of way, he came across a letter, sealed and addressed to himself.

"A letter for me, and not even opened !" he thought, in some surprise. "Where in the world did it come from ?"

Instantaneously there flashed across his mind the recollection of that last night in England, and of the *rencontre* with Milby after midnight.

"What a shame!" he exclaimed, aloud; "I promised the poor fellow to read it, and here it is unopened now. What must he think of me!"

He tore it open, and glanced hastily down the page, and as he read a sudden change came over his face. Turning to the door, he shut and locked it, and then, sitting down by the table, rested his elbows upon it, and read the letter from beginning to end.

"I beg your pardon for writing to you, sir, but when I heard you were going out in the *Eglantine*, I felt I must tell you. I know it is as much as my place is worth to do it, and if Mr. Grant knew, he would send me off without any character, or with even worse—a bad one. It is betraying his private business and violating his confidence, and yet I must tell you, for you have been truly good and kind to me. When I had no friend in the world, you came forward and got me this place, and always when you see me you have a cheering word, and often you put your hand in your pocket to give me what your kindness prompts. I shall never forget all you have done for a poor, friendless old man, and now that it is in my power to tell you what you ought to know, I feel that I must do it. This morning I was standing near Mr. Hilliard's office, when you met Captain Thorpe and stopped to speak to him. From what was said I gathered that you

were going to Quebec in that wretched *Eglantine*, and that she was to sail immediately. I followed you down to the docks and tried to catch you alone, but could not do it, and I was forced to go back to my work without speaking to you. Then I determined to write and wait at your door till you came home, and give you the letter. I heard you say you were not going to your father's house. What will you say when I tell you? Will you think I am telling a tale made up to answer some end of my own? I cannot help it if you do. Some months ago, nearly a year now, Mr. Grant surveyed the *Eglantine*. She had come to grief in her last voyage, and was brought into the dry docks for repairs. He made a careful survey, and wrote the result to Mr. Hilliard, your father, giving me the letter to put in the copying-press. When I took it out, I glanced down to see if a fair copy were taken; it was very fair, more so than usual. I remember noticing it. This is what he wrote, or the substance of it: 'I have made a thorough and careful examination of the *Eglantine*, and find her in a very bad condition, rotten almost to the core. The butts for mainstays and maintop stays are rotten, endangering the mainmast; the mizenmast is unsafe; the planks, in many places, so rotten, as to come to pieces with a touch.' I cannot remember all the ship terms used; I don't understand them, but I remember Mr. Grant's sum up: 'In her present state, the

Eglantine is certainly not fit for sea ; indeed, I doubt if any repairs will make her seaworthy ; that is to say, for a long voyage. As a *coaster* she will be safe enough, if thoroughly repaired.' There was a long list of necessary repairs, and a full account of the ship's present condition ; but, as I said before, I cannot remember them. Mr. Grant never knew I saw the letter—that is to say, read it. It was my place to put letters in the copying-press, but not to read them. When the vessel was repaired he went over it again, and sent a further report to Mr. Hilliard, confirming what he had previously said : She was safe as a *coaster*, but certainly not fit for a long voyage. At first I wondered that Mr. Hilliard dared send her out after that verdict, but then I remembered that he was a rich ship-owner, and Grant a poor man, with an elastic conscience and a large family, and the mystery was explained. You will forgive me writing thus, Mr. Christian ; my conscience would not let me be silent. I rely upon your generosity not to betray me ; if you do, I shall lose my place."

Christian Hilliard's first indignant impulse was to tear the letter in shreds ; but as he read, the truth of the plain, straightforward state forced itself upon him, and he sat overwhelmed with bitter shame !—shame, in the knowledge that his father had voluntarily, and for the sake of gain, sent out the unfortunate *Eglantine* to risk an almost certain destruction.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

THERE was a hush upon the waters, and a deep calm, for there had been no wind for days. In the quiet stillness of the night the *Eglantine* floated lazily over the smooth surface, leaving in her wake a path of shining phosphor-light.

"That's a pretty enough sight," said the captain, pausing by Christian's side as he leaned over the rail; "but I'd rather see the foam on some good-sized waves just now. We've had enough of this lazy weather."

"Do you think this calm will last?" asked Christian, his quiet voice betraying nothing of the inward storm of bitter shame and grief.

"Not long now, sir; the barometer has fallen low, and I expect a change soon. The wind is rising a little now, I fancy."

As he spoke the murmur of the wind was heard among the rigging, and the sails flapped noisily.

"Yes, it's coming sure enough; I thought all this calm wasn't for nothing. We shall have a gale now, Mr. Christian."

"That means a storm, I suppose."

"Well, as likely as not we shall have some pretty roughish weather. The sea always reminds

me of a cat ; she keeps her claws well hidden till the last minute, and then gives a smart scratch. It's a treacherous sort of thing, is the sea."

"Thorpe, in case of a storm, what would you do with the cargo?" asked Christian, abruptly.

"All depends, sir ; the cargo's pretty heavy, but it won't hurt in an ordinary gale."

"That is to say, if the vessel is sound," replied Christian, quietly.

"Of course, sir."

"And if it is not?"

"But the *Eglantine* is," replied Captain Thorpe, emphatically.

"No, she is not!" said Christian, in sharp bitter tones, wrung from him by the terrible anguish of his heart. "Don't you know when a vessel is seaworthy?"

"No, that I do not, without examining her ; neither does any other man. I have never examined the *Eglantine*, but Grant has, and he says she's sound enough."

"There has been some fatal mistake," answered Christian, striving to calm the ceaseless whirl of thought ; "the *Eglantine* is *not* seaworthy."

Captain Thorpe stared at him in speechless amazement.

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Christian?" he exclaimed at last.

"It has only just come to my knowledge, went on Christian, cut to the very heart by the necessity for telling this man anything that might

throw suspicion upon his father's name. But there was no help for it; the lives of the crew must be saved if possible, even at the expense of his father's honour. The rising wind, and now rapidly gathering clouds, warned him that there was no time to be lost, and that any precautions that could be taken should not be delayed a moment.

"A letter was given me before I left England and I slipped it in my pocket and forgot it. Now I have come across it and have read it," he said, mechanically. "It tells me that the *Eglantine* is not fit for a long voyage, that no repairs could make her so."

"Who's the letter from?" asked Captain Thorpe, unbelievably.

"One who knows," answered Christian, with a gesture of mingled pain and impatience.

At that moment he could not brook contradiction or doubt. He knew the letter to be no false statement; those last interviews with his father gave fatal confirmation of its truth. He could understand now all that had puzzled him then; the strange inexplicable anger with which his father had received the news of his intended voyage to Quebec; his utter refusal to show him Grant's letter. All was explained now, only too fully.

"But who could know save Grant and Mr. Hilliard?" persisted the captain, still incredulous.

"I cannot tell you who my informant is; it is enough that I *know* his statement to be correct," said Christian, wearily. "I was forced to tell

you in order that all necessary precautions might be taken. Have no thought for the cargo ; I authorise you to throw every shred overboard the moment there appears the least necessity. Do not wait till the last moment, but if the gale rises pretty fast, do it at once. I not only authorise, but, in my father's name, command it."

"What ! throw the whole cargo overboard for a bit of a gale !" cried the astonished captain. "Excuse me, but you must be off your head, Mr. Christian ! What would your father say if I were to go back and tell him I had pitched everything overboard without real necessity ?"

"There is real necessity ! If the vessel sprang a leak in a storm, would she stand a better chance with or without a heavy cargo ?"

"Without it, of course. But who says the *Eglantine* will spring a leak ?"

"I say there is every fear of it. Why will you not believe me ?" answered Christian, sharply. Little used as he was to opposition, coming at such a time it irritated him almost beyond endurance. "I will exonerate you from all blame."

"Mr. Christian," said the captain, slowly, "if what you say is true, there has been a great and shameful wickedness committed."

They stood looking at each other in silence : the one with the darkness of a gathering suspicion on his face, and the gleam of a righteous anger in his eyes ; the other overshadowed by the dull, heavy stupor of an unutterable grief and shame.

"I know it!" came the low answer, forced by an effort from the reluctant lips. "But what I say *is* true."

"And the *Eglantine* is unseaworthy?"

"She is."

The captain ripped out a black oath, bringing his clenched fist with a heavy blow on the rail. "And I persuaded the poor fellows to come to their death!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "I'd rather have chopped off my right hand than do such devil's work. What am I to say to them, sir?"

"Is there need to tell them what I have told you? They will obey your orders without knowing the why and wherefore. Would it be wise to tell them all?"

The captain pondered. "No, it would not be wise," he said. "It would dishearten them, and take away perhaps their only chance. Let them work on, hoping for the best. Tell me all you know, Mr. Christian; it may guide me somewhat."

He spoke gently, from his heart pitying the proud head bowed with a weight of dishonour far worse than death. At the same time, a suspicion that a hoax had been played upon Christian would force itself upon him; but as he listened to some extracts from the letter it faded away, leaving him convinced of the truth of the statement.

"Why didn't the writer of that letter, whoever he may be, give warning before? Why did he wait till the very last moment, and then tell you

in that way? There has been foul work, Mr. Christian."

"Not on his part; he is honest enough. I fancy he knew nothing of the *Eglantine's* destination till he chanced to hear I was going with her. At any rate, it is too late now; we can only do our best for the men. I can trust you to lose sight of everything but their safety, Captain Thorpe."

"I will do all I can, sir: no mortal man can say more than that."

"I have only one comfort," said Christian, with a ring of passionate feeling in his voice; "if they die, I am here to die with them."

"That's poor comfort," said the captain, grimly. "Most men would have felt it more comforting if they had stayed on shore. You are one of the right sort, Mr. Christian."

He turned away to give some orders to the men, and Cairns, who had been standing near, came and took his place.

"We are not going to have such a quiet voyage home as we had coming, Mr. Christian. Look at them clouds, and hark at the wind, sir! that means mischief. It'll be something more than a gale."

"What makes you think so?" asked Christian, with forced composure.

Cairns shook his head. "I know the signs, sir; this long calm hasn't been for nothing. I'm blessed if I can understand the winds! they're for

all the world as if they had life in 'em, and knew what they were up to. Here they've been keeping quiet all this time, just to come down upon us with a swoop at last ! Aggravating things they are ! ”

The sea was rising rapidly, and overhead the black clouds gathered in heavy piles. As midnight drew near the wind grew louder and more boisterous, coming in fitful gusts ; and the sullen thunder muttered in the distance.

Coming up from the cabin, Christian found the crew busily engaged in lightening the vessel of her heavy cargo, and murmuring among themselves at the task.

“ The skipper's clean gone off his head ! ” grumbled one of the men. “ The cargo ain't nothing like so heavy as what we brought out, and yet he goes and flings it overboard ! ”

“ You hold your tongue,” said Cairns ; “ the skipper knows what he's about. You don't know anything about these latitudes, and we do ; this ain't a gale such as you get in the Channel, I can tell you ! ”

The wind had increased in fury, and the waves were running mountains high, breaking into white foaming crests on every side. The heavens were of pitchy darkness, save when a vivid lightning flash darted through the masses of black cloud, illuminating for one moment the wild confusion above and below.

“ I have done all I can, sir,” said Captain

Thorpe. "The men are lightening the ship, and all we can do now is to wait for results. She may weather it yet."

The morning dawned cold and grey, but still the storm raged fiercely. Toward noon the wind subsided, and Christian's hopes began to rise. Every thought of his heart was a prayer that the lives of these men might be saved. In the solitude of his cabin he wrestled hard with an almost overwhelming sense of helplessness and self-condemnation.

"I brought them into this death," he groaned. "Oh, God! will the responsibility lie with me?" But even as he uttered these words they were answered. He saw himself standing before his father, and heard the question, "Is the *Eglantine* seaworthy?" And the reply rose up before him with torturing distinctness—"She is seaworthy." No; the responsibility did not lie with him.

Night again closed round them, and still the winds were lulled; but at ten o'clock they suddenly burst upon the vessel from another quarter, splitting the foresail into fragments, and carrying it far away in the darkness. If the wind and waves had run riot before, they ran wilder riot now. Every moment the heavy cross seas swept over the deck, carrying everything before them.

"Hold hard, sir! hold hard!" shouted the captain; "don't let go for your life."

Christian turned, and saw a vast mountain of white crested water looming above them; and

then down it came with a crash, and he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself, a strong arm was holding him firmly round the waist. "You were nearly done for then, Mr. Christian," said Cairns' familiar voice. "It's a good thing I was close behind you, sir, or you'd have stood no chance of seeing old England again. One of the boats is gone, worse luck!" It had been swinging by them the minute before, but the mighty strength of the wave had snapped its holdings, and carried it far to leeward.

Then, as if the wind were satisfied for a time, there was a lull, and the waters grew a little calmer. Cairns still stood close to Christian.

"We haven't seen the end yet," he said. "I feel a sort of care about you, Mr. Christian, because it was 'long of me you came. Won't you go down a bit, sir? You ain't used to this sort of thing, and maybe you'll want all your strength by-and-by."

"Ay, do," said the captain's voice close at hand; "I want a word with you, sir."

They went down, and the captain shut the door. "Do you know that one of the boats is gone?" he asked. "That last wave snapped the davits as clean as a newly-cut carrot. I never saw such a thing in my life before. There is only one now, and that the small one."

"Well?" said Christian.

"Well, sir, just this. If what you tell me is

true, the ship cannot hold out much longer, and will probably spring a leak. In that case the boats were our only chance, and now the biggest is gone. The little one cannot hold us all."

Christian looked at him in dull, mute horror.

"Some *must* be left here to die," went on the captain.

"How many?"

So unnatural was the voice, that Thorpe started.

"At least two, besides myself," he answered briefly.

"*'Besides yourself!'* Do you mean to stop?"

"Could I ask anyone to stay instead? I can ask them to stop *with* me. Mr. Christian, as sure as we live, God's vengeance will fall on him who sent the *Eglantine* out to meet her doom!"

"It will," said Christian, hoarsely. "God is just!"

"I am not a good man—I never pretended to care for such things as religion—but I believe that if I die to-night, God will not let the hand that sent me, knowingly, to my death, go unpunished. If I and my poor fellows go to hell, there'll be a lower hell for him who sent us there. Sir, it is a foul, cold-blooded murder!"

"It is!" groaned Christian. "God help us!"

"Do not think I am blaming you, sir. You have acted the part of an honest man, and I honour you for it. Very few would have troubled themselves about a few poor sailors as you have

done. I must go on deck now, but there's no knowing what may happen, and I may never see you again, so good-bye, sir."

His rough voice trembled as he wrung Christian's hand, and his eye lingered upon the bronzed face, which he had in those few short weeks learned to love as he loved no other thing on earth.

The wind was gradually falling, and the mountainous waves rolling less wildly round the vessel when he reached the deck. "She may weather it yet," he thought, with a gleam of hope springing up; but the next moment it was dashed out for ever. There came a sudden cry in the darkness, piercing the tumult of the boisterous waves and filling every heart with dread:

"She has sprung a leak!"

For a moment Captain Thorpe was stupefied into silence: then he gave orders mechanically to man the pumps.

Christian, in the cabin below, knew nothing of the dismay above. The roar of the tempest was all that he could hear; but the falling of the wind was bringing with it hope, when the captain's hand fell on his shoulder, and in his face he read the fatal truth.

"The men are hard at work with the pumps, Mr. Christian, but it is of no use; the water is rising rapidly, and the hold is filling!"

Slowly Christian seemed to comprehend his meaning.

"And the pumps are our last chance!" he said.

"Our last chance, and it is failing!"

He went back to the deck, and Christian rose to follow. But his head swam, and he sank back into his seat. Until that moment he had not entirely given up hope. Now the fiat had gone forth, and he knew what was coming.

"Lost!" he murmured, "lost! God forgive *him!*"

How long a time had passed he did not know, when he heard the captain's voice in his ear.

"Come, sir; the boat is ready."

They went up and found the men waiting for their captain. It was early morning dawn, and their faces were haggard with suspense and fear. They were no cowards; but death was staring them in the face, and they dared not look at it.

"The boat won't hold all, sir," said one, with eager, pleading eyes. He was only a boy, and a widowed mother waited his coming in the little cottage-home, and—life was sweet.

"I know it," was the calm reply. "My men, some must stay behind! Who shall it be! Who will stay with me?"

"And me?" said Christian, stepping to his side.

There rose a murmur from the men. Not one among them but loved and respected the man who had voluntarily undergone discomfort and inconvenience for their sake, and they revolted against leaving him there to die.

"Not you, sir! not you!" said Cairns, imploringly. "Let me stay instead. There is room for all but two, Captain," he said, turning to Thorpe. "Jackson was washed away by that last wave! Mr. Christian can go in his place!"

The captain stretched out his hand. "You are a brave man to die with, Cairns," he said, simply.

"Now, sir, if you please; there is no time to spare."

"What do you take me for?" cried Christian, his eyes gleaming with passionate anger and indignation. "Get in this moment, Cairns!"

"But, sir!" he pleaded.

"Do you hear what I say?" came the stern peremptory words, for it was no time for gentle persuasion. "Do as I command you."

A strange lull had fallen on the fury of the storm, and the *Eglantine* was filling fast. The men had crowded into the boat, and were waiting for the word to push off.

"Go," repeated Christian, "and take this for my father. Give it him from me." He placed a letter in his hand as he spoke, and pushed him towards the boat. For one moment Cairns hesitated, and then he threw up his arms passionately.

"What! go and leave you here to die! when I was the one as made you come? Dash it all, sir, am I a brute? Why, the very dogs stay by their drowning master. Push off, mates: I'm going to stay. Here, Ned, take this letter for Mr. Hilliard. Good-bye, mates!"

With his own hand he unfastened the rope, and the next minute the boat was far from the fast-sinking ship. The young boy cowered down in his seat, and hid his face with a shuddering gasp. "I wish I'd stayed!" he moaned. "I'd rather have died with them ; they're good men."

"Don't talk of dying, lad," said one, kindly. "We'll get home yet."

And so they left the *Eglantine* to find her last resting-place in the shadowless depths of the wild Atlantic.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

THE clerks in Mr. Hilliard's office were gathered together in earnest conversation. All work seemed to be forgotten in the prevailing excitement, as they crowded round Headson, the head clerk, with eager questioning.

"You'll send to Mr. Hilliard at once, won't you?" said one. "How do you think he'll take it?"

A sudden silence fell upon the group, as, at the mention of his name, Mr. Hilliard appeared in the doorway.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, with icy coldness. "I am glad to find your time so well employed. Perhaps, however, if you have had sufficient recreation, you will oblige me by returning to your desks."

They took their seats in perfect silence, for the first time untouched by the hated sarcasm; and he passed on into his private office, Headson following. As he shut the door, Mr. Hilliard turned sharply round.

"What do you want?" he asked, with the quick accent of irritation. "When I wish for your presence, I will ring."

"An important telegram has just come, sir," was the hesitating reply. "I thought it best to tell you at once."

There was something in his tone, something in his face, which drew Mr. Hilliard's attention. "What is it?" he asked.

"Bad news of one of the vessels, sir. I fear it is lost," answered the clerk, wishing himself anywhere but where he was.

An awful suspicion began to dawn upon Mr. Hilliard's mind, and he stood gazing before him with paling face. "Is it——?" He paused, unable to frame the name, while the cold, damp perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

"Is it the—*Eglantine*?" With stern determination he forced his lips to utter the words, claspings with iron grasp the back of the chair by which he stood.

"Yes, sir; she sprang a leak, and——"

"Are they saved?"

Headson started; the voice was so strange and dull.

"Some of them, sir," he answered, reluctantly. "Most of them, I may say, but——"

He *could* not tell the fated truth, *could* not utter the words which Mr. Hilliard was waiting to hear.

"And my son is dead?" came the slow, forced words.

"I fear so, sir; and the captain and Cairns. The rest are saved."

"Let me see the telegram."

Silently he laid it on the table, and went out, leaving him alone in the strange stupor of an overwhelming horror.

"The Eglantine was lost, and his son was dead."

* * * * *

"Can I see Mr. Hilliard?"

"What do you want him for? He won't see you," was the supercilious reply.

"Yes, he will, if you tell him I have something to tell him about Mr. Christian. I belonged to the *Eglantine*."

The footman drew back instantly, his look and tone changing. "Come in and sit down. I'll tell master you're here," he said, leading the way to the housekeeper's room. "He's over his wine now, and don't like to be disturbed."

The boy drew back. "I can't wait long. Just you tell him it's Ned Wright, who went to sea 'long with Mr. Christian, will you? I've got something for him."

"What is it?" asked the man, his curiosity excited. "Let me see."

"You can't see nothing but an envelope, and that won't satisfy you; you'll want to see the inside, and you just won't," replied the boy, saucily.

Mr. Hilliard sat alone in his luxuriously furnished room, gazing with vacant eyes into the blazing fire. His glass of wine stood by his hand

untouched, and for the last hour he had not moved. At the sound of the opening door he started, turning his head with a shrinking fear.

"If you please, sir, here's a boy who was on board the *Eglantine*: he's got a letter for you," said the man, apologetically.

Mr. Hilliard stared at him with dull, lustreless eyes. "The *Eglantine*—a letter," he repeated, mechanically.

"From Mr. Christian, sir," was the subdued reply. "May he come in?"

At a sign from his master he beckoned the boy to enter, and then went out, shutting the door.

"You have a letter for me."

"Yes, sir," said the lad, nervously twisting his cap. "Mr. Christian he give it Cairns, and Cairns give it me. I was to be sure and give it you myself, sir."

He advanced towards the table as he spoke, and taking the letter out of his pocket, laid it down. It was crumpled and dirty, bearing evident signs of salt water.

"How came you all to leave *him* there to die? Was there not one among you to lift a finger to save *him*?" said Mr. Hilliard, vainly striving to steady his trembling hands.

"He wouldn't come, sir! Cairns stayed too, when there was room for one in the boat. They wouldn't leave the ship."

"And she went down. You saw her?" came the scarcely audible words.

"We didn't see her sink, sir ; but she was filling fast. We dared not stay another minute."

"That will do ; you may go."

In speechless amazement the boy went out.

"He never asked one question about Mr. Christian !" he exclaimed, finding his voice outside ; "he didn't even look at the letter !"

With an anguish too terrible and strong for utterance, Richard Hilliard stood looking at the silent messenger on the table. Go near it, touch it, he dared not. What did it contain ? If he opened it, upon what words, what dreaded sentence would his eyes rest ? In those last hours of life, had some strange, mysterious instinct revealed to his son that one secret ? Would he find reproach and bitter scorn within the folded paper ? "Open it and know the worst. How could he learn the fatal truth ?" urged his stronger will. "What have you to fear ?" What had he to fear ? He scarcely knew, and yet the dread that was upon him was almost more than he could bear. Again and again he approached the table, and again and again he turned from it with failing courage. The wish to know what message had come to him from the son who was now lying cold and dead in the depths of the sea, became absolute torture in its intensity.

Slowly, wearily dragged on the heavy hours, and still he paced the room with restless steps. Midnight came at last, and the clock chimed out the hour. He stood still and listened till the last

sound died away, and then with desperate resolution drew near once more and took up the crumpled envelope. So saturated had it been with salt water, that it needed scarcely a touch to unfasten, and he held the letter in his hand. For some moments the lines swam and intermingled, and then stood out with sudden and startling clearness.

“FATHER,—It is probably the last time I shall ever take up my pen to write to you. When you receive this the hand that wrote it will be still for ever in the quiet depths of the sea. There is a fierce storm raging around us, and *you know* what our chances are of weathering it. How can I write to you—what can I say? It has come upon me with an awful force, crushing me to the ground with the bitterest shame! No matter how I know. I *do* know, and can understand now your refusal to show me Grant’s letter. ‘*As a coaster she is safe enough, but she is certainly not fit for a long voyage. Nothing can make her so.*’ Do you recognise the words? I would rather that you had died than that you should have done this deed! My own death I am not speaking of, not thinking of; it fades into utter insignificance before the fact that you, my father, sent these poor fellows to their doom; that you let me in my ignorance lead them to their graves! That is the bitter overwhelming thought; *they trusted me*, they gave their lives into my keeping, and I brought them here to die. Oh God! it is hard to bear—that you, my father,

whom I have loved and honoured, should have done this thing! You, whom I looked up to, and trusted as the very soul of honour! You, whom my mother——”

Here the lines were blurred and smeared, rendered unreadable by the running of the ink. Lower down they again became distinct.

“But I do not wish to reproach you; there is time for only a few words, and I have other things to say. Will you let your son’s death be the last ever laid to your account? Will you promise me that never again shall your hand cause the sound of mourning to be heard in the homes of widows and fatherless children? I have heard some words about you this night that I dare not gainsay, that I *cannot* repeat. Father, it is a fearful thing to live with the curses of drowning men upon your head! It is a fearful thing to die with the memory of those curses in your heart! God help you!”—again the lines fading into indistinctness—“and for the last time, *good-bye*.”

The letter dropped from Richard Hilliard’s hand, and he sank into his arm-chair, his head falling on the table. How long he lay in utter insensibility he knew not, and at last came returning consciousness with its torturing memories. Picking up the letter, he folded it, and glancing round with fearful eyes, opened his desk, and placed it in a private drawer. With slow and faltering steps he went upstairs to bed, but not to sleep. The wind

was howling round the house, now rising, now falling, shaking the shutters, and dashing the bare boughs of the trees outside against the windows. In the darkness he lay and listened till his excited imagination called forth voices from the tumult. He heard the plaintive cries of little wailing children, calling in vain for the rough hands that would never more be laid in tenderness upon their sunny curls. He heard the sobs of childless mothers, the moans of broken-hearted widows! Then in a wild burst came passionate curses and imprecations from the lips of men struggling for life in the seething sea, and calling down God's wrath upon the hand that had sent them to their death. And clear and low through all ran a ceaseless undercurrent—"It is a fearful thing to die with the memory of those curses in your heart!"

In vain he got up and paced the floor and tried to think of other things; nothing could banish the haunting words. At last, wearied out he sank into a fitful, troubled sleep, and in his sleep an unutterable horror fell upon him. Round him, on every hand, gathered the cold dark waters, filling his eyes and mouth and ears, yet letting him hear and see. Long bands of slimy seaweed wound round him from head to foot, almost stifling him in their close embrace; and at his feet lay the bodies of dead men, cold and stiff, with their glassy eyes fixed and open. He tried to shout, but his voice was choked; he tried to move, but the

swathes of seaweed held him fast. In an agony he struggled, while the contact with dead hands chilled his blood with loathing, when suddenly through the silent waters came the sound of a voice he knew full well—" *It is a fearful thing to die with the memory of those curses in your heart.*" Then the pale lips round him opened, and innumerable voices called upon his name in tones of passionate rage and reproach. Louder and louder they grew, closer and closer gathered the bands of seaweed, dragging him down, down; and with a cry that rang through the house, he awoke.

Bathed in perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he lay and listened to the storm. Stimulated by his dream, his busy imagination pictured his son lying in the stillness of death among the ghastly company of drowned men. He saw the beautiful classic face, with the fair hair washed from its sunburnt forehead, and seaweeds clinging round. He saw the fall of the eyelashes on the bronzed cheek, the quiet grace of the folded hands, the statuesque repose of the stately form!

"Oh God!" he groaned, in the anguish of his heart. "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

The night passed, giving place to day. Once more he mingled with the busy world; but go where he would there followed that never-ceasing voice from the sea—" *It is a fearful thing to die with the memory of those curses in your heart.*"

* * * * *

Far away on the wide waste of waters a little raft was slowly floating on with the tide. Having neither rudder nor oar, it lay at the mercy of wind and wave. For four long days and nights it had floated through storm and calm, and now its occupants were well-nigh exhausted. At one end sat Christian Hilliard, having Cairns' head on his knee, at the other end Captain Thorpe looked on in moody silence.

"It's getting very dark, Mr. Christian," said Cairns faintly. "About what time may it be, do you think, sir?"

"Nearly four, by the light, I should say. Do you feel a little stronger, Cairns?"

"Nearly four," he repeated dreamily, not heeding the question. "I wonder what my little maid is doing now. She thinks I'm dead; no, no, not yet. They haven't got home to tell. Poor little maid! I wonder what she'll say!"

"Cheer up, Cairns," said Thorpe, huskily; "you'll see the child again soon, please God."

Cairns shook his head faintly. "He don't please, captain. I shall never see old England again. My time's up."

They made no reply, for they felt the words were true. Gradually the deepening darkness gathered round, and the clouds overhead grew thick and black.

"Mr. Christian," said Cairns, suddenly, "what did the little maid mean about the gate?"

"What gate?" said Christian, starting.

"In the west ; she said, ' When sunset's in the west.' It was all gold and rose colour, with little flaky clouds."

" I know ; she was quoting a hymn ; ' Jerusalem the Golden.' Do you know what that means, Cairns ? "

" Ay, ay, sir : the city with the golden streets. What about—the gate—sir ? "

His voice was failing fast, and Christian bent low to listen.

" ' When sunset's in the west, it seems thy gate of glory, thou city of the blest.' That is what Nannie meant, Cairns."

" She wanted to know if father would go far enough to see the gate. Bless her ! I'm far enough for that already. It ain't a very long way off, Mr. Christian."

" Are you going through, Cairns ? " asked Christian, gently.

" Ay, sir. *He'll* take me through. He's stood my friend—this many a long year. I've been weak, and often—sinful, Mr. Christian, but—I always——"

His voice was lost in the low roll of the thunder, and a few heavy drops of rain began to fall. Christian drew the coat closely up round the dying man's throat.

" Never mind, sir ; I don't feel the cold. Was that thunder ? "

" Yes ; a storm is coming on. Is there anything you would like me to do if——"

"If you get safe—to land, you mean, sir. Only the little maid."

"She shall be my especial care all my life," said Christian, hastily. "She shall want for nothing."

The cold wind rose higher and higher, tossing the raft to and fro. Suddenly Cairns began to talk, and Christian again bent low; but he was not speaking to him.

"Father's going right out into the light, Nannie; maybe his little maid won't be long a-coming after. Out into the gold, Nannie; right through the gate."

"What's that he's saying, sir?" asked Thorpe.

"Hush! he's talking to the child," answered Christian, a mist gathering before his eyes.

"Father always loved his little maid! He'll bring her home something pretty from—the gate—no, Quebec; which is it? Where's Mr. Christian?"

"I'm here, Cairns."

"Sir, don't fret about it: it weren't your doing. It'll all come right in the—West. What's that?"

A vivid lightning flash, followed by a crash of thunder, lighted up the dark scene.

"A bit of the gold, Nannie, shining to light me through. Did you hear the gate roll back?"

"Is it peace, Cairns?" asked Christian, striving to steady his voice.

"It's all light in the West, sir. Bright and—beautiful light! I'm going home through—the storm!"

Another flash, and then a roar of thunder, and the rain came down in torrents.

"Cairns!" said Christian, laying his hand on the cold forehead; "Cairns, speak!"

But there was no answer, for the spirit had passed away, 'mid the noise of the storm, into the Golden West. They laid him silently down, covering the still, dead face, and then waited for the morn. It came at last, and Thorpe spoke in a low subdued tone:

"Mr. Christian, won't you say something over the poor fellow?"

They knelt down by the motionless form, and bowed their heads in prayer. Then, 'mid the tumult of the waves, rose the words of the burial service:

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

And down into the deep water sank the silent form, there to await a sure and certain resurrection unto eternal life.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

“SO old Richard Hilliard is dying! They say he cannot get over the loss of his son who went down with the *Eglantine*. An unfortunate piece of business that.”

So spake the busy crowd, and then the subject was forgotten.

In his lonely chamber Richard Hilliard was reaping the reward of his ill-spent past. Utterly alone—for he would admit no acquaintance, and friend he had none—he lay on what seemed to be his dying bed, uncared for and unloved. All his physical wants were attended to by his servants, but the only one who would have given him the loving service of the heart was no longer there. Day and night the old man lay in what seemed to be a stupor, unheeding all that passed around, and drawing nearer the end of life. The doctor shook his head as he felt the feeble pulse and tried in vain to rouse him.

“Has he no relative, no friend to care for him?” he asked.

But they looked at each other doubtfully, answering, “No; they had never heard him mention any. Mr. Christian was all he had.”

And in his solitude strange visions haunted both waking and sleeping hours. Visions of the past filling him with remorse ; visions of the present thrilling his heart with anguish ; visions of *what might have been*, teaching him the bitter lesson of a ruined, wasted life. Vivid memories were ever present of doubtful deeds ; and *worse*—of things done, and things left undone ; of words he would fain have recalled. But it was too late ! the irrevocable past lay far beyond his reach ; he could but lie and look at it with the fruitless repentance of an aching heart.

* * * * *

The shades of evening were fast closing round, when two men in rough, weather-beaten garments, landed from an American brig. No one noticed them as they passed quickly through the busy yard, and they rather shunned than courted observation. At the entrance of a quiet by-street they paused, and Captain Thorpe, for it was he, pointed to a house a few yards down.

“ That’s where *he* lived, Mr. Christian,” he said, in the low, subdued tone with which mention is always made of those who are gone.

“ I suppose the child is still there ? ”

Hesitating for one moment, Christian Hilliard sprang up the steps and knocked at the door. A clean, tidy-looking woman in a widow’s cap opened it, and looked at him in some astonishment. It was not often they had such a visitor.

“ Is this where Edward Cairns used to live ? ”

"Yes, sir ; he used to lodge here."

"Is his little girl still here?"

"Little Nannie ! Lor', sir, she's dead this six weeks or more !"

"Dead !" cried Christian, sharply ; "what was the matter with her ? What did she die of ?"

"She'd been ailing a long time, sir," answered the woman, wondering what interest he could possibly have in the child. "The doctor said she was in a decline."

"Did she have everything that was needful ? Did she want for anything ?"

She shook her head.

"No, sir ; that she didn't want for anything. Cairns, he was a good father, and left me plenty of money to buy things for her. She had wine and grapes—hot-house grapes, sir ; not many, you know ; she never eat much, didn't Nannie."

"When did she die ?"

"Let me see ; six, no, seven weeks ago come Friday."

"Next Friday !" echoed Thorpe, with a sudden start. "Why, that was the very night *he* died, Mr. Christian."

"The very night," repeated Christian, quietly. "Perhaps he knew."

They passed on, and at the cross-roads parted ; Thorpe going towards his own home, Christian towards Mr. Ingleton's. There was a light in the little sitting-room, and he stopped and looked through the venetians. By the fireplace sat Maud,

with her hands idly folded on her lap. She was in deep black, and the sweet face looked fairer than ever in its quiet sadness.

For a few minutes he stood and watched, debating within himself whether he should go in at once, or break the news in some other way first ; but the temptation to see for himself the brightening of the wistful eyes was too strong, and he went in. He knew the ways of the house, and where everybody was likely to be at that time. The door of the room was only closed, and with a gentle push it opened noiselessly. As he stepped across the floor she looked up in quick surprise, wondering at the heavy footfall. There was one moment of agonising doubt, and then the light of a joy too great for words. Never till then had Christian known and realised how dear she was to him.

The wondering family soon gathered round, scarcely able to believe that it was really Christian in the body.

"But I don't understand," said Mr. Ingleton, in his bewilderment. "Didn't the *Eglantine* spring a leak and go down? That's what they told us."

"Papa, don't you understand?" said Maud, her face glowing with proud happiness. "Tell him from the beginning, Christian."

"Yes, sir, the vessel sprang a leak, and we sent the men off in a boat, but by some unknown means the water stopped coming in. We were expect-

ing every minute to be our last, and indeed there would not have been the slightest chance for us if the storm had continued. It seemed to cease at once, and the waves grew calmer. Cairns came and told us that the water did not rise in the hold, but we could not believe it; it seemed too good to be true. However, it was true, though how it came about we never knew. Something got blocked in the hole and stopped it up, I suppose; such things have happened before now. Then we set to work and made a raft, not daring to stay in the *Eglantine*; there was no safety in her; she was knocked about so fearfully. A very little would put an end to her, so we left her to her fate."

"Did she sink, do you think?" asked a younger sister, with breathless interest.

"I fear so; indeed, there was no chance of anything else."

"And you floated about on that raft for five days?"

"For five long weary days."

"Christian," whispered Maud, as she wished him good-night at the door; "perhaps he was really talking to his little girl."

"Perhaps so, darling; we cannot tell." He had been telling her of that lonely death in the midst of the storm, and the hot tears had fallen fast as she listened. "We cannot know at what moment the veil is lifted."

He turned away from the brightness and light

into the cold dark night. They had told him of his father's illness, and he could not stay away from him. Mr. Ingleton overtook him at the gate.

"I'll walk with you, Christian," he said; "it's a dreary walk alone." They walked on, talking of the unfortunate *Eglantine*, till they came to the lodge gate.

"Miles will think it's your ghost: he'll have a fit," said Mr. Ingleton, as the old gate-keeper appeared with his lamp.

"Be it the doctor?" he said, peering into the darkness. "Be the master worse?"

"Don't you know me, Miles?"

At the sound of the familiar voice, the old man started.

"Who be you?" he asked fearfully. "Not—— why, it is! Mr. Christian!"

"Are you sure it isn't his ghost, Mr. Miles?" said Mr. Ingleton, jokingly.

"Ghost, sir! not it, sir! I know him too well. Drat the gates, they won't open! Come in, Mr. Christian! bless you, sir! This is a night, sure-ly!"

In his delight he seized Christian by the arm and held him fast.

"Then you wasn't drowned, after all? I can't scarcely believe my old eyes. Won't the old master be glad."

"How is he, Miles!"

"He was sinking fast the last time as I heard, sir. Do'ee come in and let my old 'oman see you, sir; it'll do her such a power o' good."

"I'll come and see her to-morrow," answered Christian, kindly. "I will bring her something that will cheer her up. Go in and go to bed Miles: you will increase your rheumatism out in this cold."

Wishing Mr. Ingleton good-night, he went up to the house. The man who opened the door almost shrieked in his fear. Like many of his class, he was superstitious, and thought it was a ghost. The other servants came flocking round, overwhelming him with their simple, honest joy. Not one among them but loved Mr. Christian, and they could scarcely realise that he was once more amongst them in perfect health and strength.

He spoke to all and each, and then passed on up the broad staircase. At his father's door he paused. "Go in," he said to the housekeeper, who had followed him. "Go in and see if he is awake."

She went in, and in a minute returned. "Am I to tell him you are here, sir?" she whispered.

"Yes, you had better. Tell him very gently."

She went back, and he heard the low murmur of her voice within. But though he listened intently, he could not hear his father's. After what seemed to him an interminable time, she again appeared.

"He don't seem to understand, Mr. Christian! I've told him over and over, but he only looks at me as if he didn't hear. Will you come and speak to him yourself, please?"

He went into the silent, darkened room, with a curious sensation, as if he were walking in a dream, and would by-and-by awake to a reality. How would his father meet him? There came over him with a rush the memory of that last meeting, when he had been so curtly refused an interview. Would he meet with similiar treatment now? He advanced to the bedside, and stood looking down upon the worn, haggard face on the pillow. So altered—so strangely altered, he scarcely knew it.

The sunken eyes looked up into his with a glaring, questioning gaze, but the pale lips made no movement.

"Father," he said gently, bending low, "I have come safely back, you see." He did not know what to say, so spoke the first words that presented themselves. Mr. Hilliard made no reply.

"The brig, *Columbus*—picked us up——"

"Whom?" interrupted his father, in a low whisper.

"Thorpe and me," answered Christian, with painful reluctance.

A sharp spasm of pain caused his father's face to darken.

"Where is *he*—Cairns?"

"He died at sea."

"Did he—did he curse me first?"

"Father!" cried Christian, unutterably shocked, more by the tone than the words. "He died at peace with all, both God and man."

"Ah, he didn't know?"

"You did not know Cairns, father! he was so true, and good, and brave. If he had known all he would have forgiven you."

"Why?"

"Because he also had had much forgiven."

Mr. Hilliard closed his eyes with an impatient frown.

With weary, saddened heart, Christian sat in the desolate room. Glad of an excuse to get down among the servants, the nurse had gone out when he came in, and he was alone with the dying man. That he was dying he could not doubt; there was the seal of death on the sunken mouth and in the dimmed eyes. He spoke to him several times, but there was no response and at last he sank into a reverie. There came before him a striking, painful contrast—that of Cairns' last hours, with their glad *going home*, and the sad and hopeless *waiting* now before him. His heart ached as he recalled the peaceful words, "*All is bright, beautiful light in the West*," and pictured the opening of the "Gate of Glory." He would gladly, freely have given up all his father's wealth to ensure for him such an entrance into the hereafter.

The night passed away, and daylight came once more, bringing with it the congratulations of friends and acquaintances. They crowded round him, as he rode into town on Lucrece, shaking his

hand as if they would shake it off. People he had never spoken to before came up to him with welcoming looks and words.

"It is really worth being drowned, to come back and find how kindly disposed one's neighbours are," he said.

"Ah, yes, *if* we could only come to life again, sir," said a man, standing near.

"What, Lucas! is that you?" cried Christian. "When did you get here?"

"We got picked up, and brought straight away home, sir. Is it true, sir, about Cairns?" he added, hesitatingly.

"Only too true, Lucas! he died a noble death."

"Will you tell us all about it some day, sir? Me and my mates wants to put up a stone or some'ut, about it, and perhaps you'll tell us what to put on it."

"I'll help you, certainly," said Christian, sadly.

"How's the old master, sir? He ain't a-going too, is he?"

"I'm afraid so, Lucas."

The news of Christian's safety spread like wild-fire over the town, and people flocked to the doors to see him as he passed. It was very pleasant to him to hear the many heartfelt congratulations on his escape from an ocean grave, and to see the smiling faces of those who rejoiced in his return to home and his friends. He had not known till then how many knew and loved him. On his

way home, he met the doctor who attended his father, and stopped to speak to him.

"Well, Mr. Christian, this is good news I hear ; the place is full of it," said the old man heartily. "I am only sorry you find your father so ill ; the shock was too great, too severe, for his nervous system."

"The nurse tells me you give no hope, is it so?" asked Christian anxiously. "I have been to your house to see you ; but of course you were out. I could not get back sooner ; so many have waylaid me. You have seen my father?"

"Just come from him. No, Mr. Christian, I'm afraid to give you any hope ; he is sinking fast," answered the doctor gravely, and with evident sympathy. "If you had come back sooner, he might—but I don't know ; he was never strong, you know. I will call again this evening."

Still lying in half-unconsciousness, Christian found his father. Even in that short time, there was a change in the pallid face ; a deeper sinking of the eyes and mouth.

"The end cannot be far off," he thought, as he stood and watched with heavy heart. "If he would but speak!—if he would but give some sign of repentance for the past!"

But the hours slowly wore away, and still he lay in silence. Now and then Christian thought he was going to speak, and bent over him with eager waiting, but each time he was deceived, and returned to his seat in bitter disappointment. At

last, night came once more with its darkness, and the quiet moaning of the wintry wind. Within the sick-chamber, all was mournful desolateness ; without, all was dreary, melancholy blackness. Within was no ray of glorious light from the golden gate, shining upon the dying eyes ; without, no star shone out from the cloud-covered sky.

"Father," said Christian, touching the cold hand on the coverlet ; "father, can you hear me ? Can you speak one word ?"

The old man slowly opened his eyes, gazing with dull, meaningless expression into the anxious face above him.

"Father, tell me one thing ; you did not knowingly send the *Eglantine* out——"

He stopped suddenly, startled by the rush of life into the haggard face.

"It—it——" The repeated word came in heavy gasps from the parched lips.

"It is what ?" asked Christian, soothingly. "What do you mean, father ?"

The sunken eyes, full of agony, looked up to him in mute entreaty.

"*It is a—fearful thing—to die.*"

Again the gasp for breath, the struggle for speech.

"*With the memory of those curses.*" A deep silence fell upon the night. There came no sound from wind or sea, no sound from the cold, dead lips.

"Father !" cried Christian, with a shuddering

recollection of how and where he had written those words. "There came no curse from the *Eglantine*."

Too late ! Silent and motionless, in the quiet sleep of death, lay Richard Hilliard, gone to the unknown hereafter.

THE END.

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